Secular Perceptions In Sikh Faith



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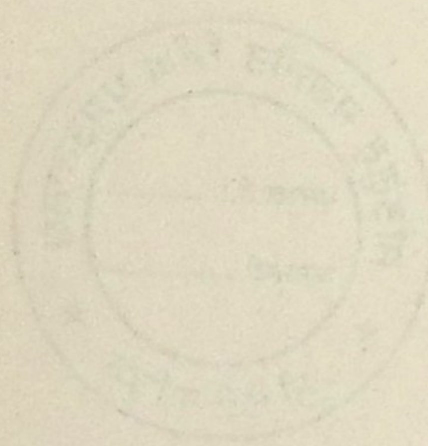
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To
Nirmaljeet Singh
who is no more

The paths may be two
but the goal is the same

—Guru Nanak

Contents

Introduction

Secularism is defined variously by various people. However, it is certainly not "rejection of all forms of religious faith". As understood by us in secular India, it consists in equal respect for all religions.

Mahatma Gandhi, father of the nation, was a staunch Hindu and yet he studied and venerated other religions whose hymns were regularly recited at his prayer-meetings. These included Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism and Sikhism. Jawaharlal Nehru professed himself a non-believer and yet he visited places of worship with the apparent devotion of his countrymen. He was invested with the sacred thread as a child and Vedic ceremonials were duly observed at his cremation and after when he was no more. Mrs. Indira Gandhi's spiritual thirst carried her to wherever she could find peace of mind, whether it was a Hindu, Muslim, Sikh or any other religious place of pilgrimage or even holy men or women.

As a people, we are wedded to secularism notwithstanding any faith we may subscribe to personally.

Sikhism is the most modern, the most recent and the most scientific faith amongst the great religions of the world. Its founder, Guru Nanak, had the advantage of having drunk deep at the founts of all the sacred religious lore. A life-long pilgrim, he visited the ancient Hindu temple at Puri in the east, Holy Mecca in the west, the ascetics at Manasarovar deep into the Himalayas in the north and Buddhist shrines in Sri Lanka. Venerated equally

by the Hindus and the Muslims in the Punjab, he is still remembered as *Baba Nanak Shah faqir, Hindu ka guru, Musalman ka pir.* Guru Nanak's times had the harrowing experience of an invasion of the Punjab by Babar. He indulged in murder and rape and destruction of property most recklessly. The poet in Guru Nanak condemned the barbarities committed by the Mughal forces fearlessly. For a moment, it seems, he revolted even against divine justice. Said he—

Aiti mar pai kurlanen!
Tainki dard no aiya?
(Such suffering and such wailing!
Did it not hurt you?) (Asa)

And yet never, never in his voluminous writing did Guru Nanak utter a word against Islam. He decried the Turks and the Pathans who attacked his country but never the Muslims who were as much his countrymen as Hindus and others. On the other hand, while undertaking a pilgrimage to Holy Mecca, he is said to have donned the blue robes of the Muslim pilgrims—

Neel bastar lai kapde pehre
Turk Pathani amal kiya
(He wore the blue robes
The way a Turk or a Pathan does.) (Asa di Var)

Born a Hindu, communal harmony was a creed with Guru Nanak. All his life he propagated it vigorously.

Guru Gobind Singh, the creator of the Khalsa, had the unique distinction of combining in himself the guru and the disciple. He baptized the Sikhs and then sat at their feet to be baptized by them. A democrat to the core of his heart, many a times he declared that he owed all his glory to his people *(Inhi ki kripa se saje ham hain).* At the close of his ministry, he invested his authority of a guru, both temporal and secular, in the panth, to the five elected representatives—*Panj Piare*

Tension between Hindus and Sikhs in the Punjab though unfortunate in the extreme is no new phenomenon. It raises its head periodically when the mischievous elements have the better of it. A few decades ago, the Sikhs had to shout from the house-tops—*Hum Hindu nahin hain* (We are not Hindus). It was to ward off a real or an imaginary attack on their identity. At that time as great a poet and patriot as Puran Singh had to come forward and say—

> "The great Hindu culture and its innate influence on Sikh culture cannot be denied.
>
> "The Sikh is no sense an alien, he is born in India, he has the glorious heritage of Indian culture, he cannot be without Prahlad and Mira. Guru Gobind Singh sent his Sikhs to Banaras to study Sanskrit. He is said to have translated Krishna Lila himself. "Our mother-country is India, our language is derived from Sanskrit, but we are modern in outlook, though also ancient as Prahlad and Krishna.
>
> "In view of the political solidarity of India, it is mischievous for anyone to suggest that we are not Hindus, and not equally Muslims. It is mischievous to multiply the points of difference with the Hindus, which are not fundamental."

What seems to bother the Sikhs is the question of their identity. There are not a few front-rank intellectuals in the community who fear that with the onslaught of modernism, the Sikhs may be swept off their feet and lose their identity. Nothing could be farther from the truth. If the gatherings of the devotees at the Sikhs Gurudwaras are any indication, the faith in the Sikh way of life is growing every day. We have amongst the Sikhs today people who would be willing to make any sacrifice for the preservation of the Sikh tradition. Gurudwara Bangla Saheb in Delhi, which used to be a quiet shrine a few decades ago, is crowded these days with devotees at all hours. And this is true of

other places of Sikh pilgrimage and shrines in any part of the country.

The Sikhs have for the first time in history a State in which they are in a majority with Punjabi as its State language, something which even the great Maharaja Ranjit Singh could not claim for the community. It is time to make the best of it rather than fritter away the fund of the community's energies in vain pursuits.

The Sikhs are a "spirit-born people" belonging to a heritage in which any community can take pride. They are hard-working and enterprising. They are friendly and forward-looking, imbued with a rare spirit of self-sacrifice. It is their endeavour mainly that has helped the country turn the corner in food production. Guarding a sensitive border, they are the virtual sword-arm of India. Their contribution to the freedom struggle is unique. Their sacrifices in various conflicts with the intruders in independent India whether they were from the north-east or the north-west are legendary. They are always in the forefront of every national endeavour. It hardly becomes a people with their great past and no less glorious present to tarnish their image with narrow and parochial considerations.

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AN APOSTLE OF AMITY AND INTEGRATION

Baba Nanak, the great man of God
Is the guru of the Hindu
And the pir of the Musalman.

This is how the Hindus and the Muslims in the Punjab came to remember Guru Nanak. It is said, when he died, the Hindus wanted to cremate him and the Muslims insisted on burying him. It is no wonder since during his lifetime while he visited Hardwar, Varanasi and Puri as a devout Hindu would do, he also went on a pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina donning the blue garments of a Turk or a Pathan. He made friends with Siddhas—Hindu ascetics—and had prolonged dialogues with them. He also cultivated Muslim divines and mystics and discoursed with them on the ways of man and God. For his constant companions he had Mardana, a Muslim *rabab*-player, and Bala, a Hindu, who is said to be the author of his earliest biography called *Janam Sakhi Bhai Bala*. He knew Persian and wrote poetry in it. He was equally proficient in Sanskrit and could claim scholarship in the Vedas and the Shastras. His was indeed an integrated personality the like of which it is difficult to imagine.

Even as a child, Guru Nanak started rejecting one after another the superstitious practices, meaningless ceremonies and antiquated rituals current in the society of his day. He annoyed not a few including his own father. He exasperated the Hindu priest and was the despair of the

Muslim *maulvi*. At that early age, his own sister Bibi Nanaki and the Muslim chief of the village, Rai Bular, noticed the divine in Guru Nanak. It is still being debated amongst theologians as to who was the first to give allegiance to the Master—his sister Bibi Nanaki or Rai Bular, the village headman.

Guru Nanak condemned hypocrisy and ritualism whether he found it in Hinduism or Islam. He believed in clean, honest living with faith in one God. He looked around and said, 'There is no Hindu; there is no Musalman.' He wanted Hindus to be good Hindus and Muslims to be good Muslims. He insisted that Islam or Hinduism did not consist in its exterior forms and formalism alone.

According to a custom prevalent among caste Hindus, Guru Nanak was to be invested with a sacred thread. It is a sacrament like baptism amongst the Christians signifying spiritual rebirth of a Hindu. When the family priest approached the young Nanak, he refused to wear the 'cotton thread'. He had no faith in the ritual. He would have nothing to do with the thread which must wear out sooner or later. Said Guru Nanak:

> Let mercy be the cotton, contentment the thread,
> Continence the knot and truth the twist,
> O Priest! if you have such a sacred thread,
> Do give it to me.
> It'll not wear out, nor get soiled, nor be burnt, nor lost.
> Says Nanak, blessed are those who wear a thread like this. (Asa)

Once the Nawab of Sultanpur and his *qazi* invited Guru Nanak to say prayers with them. Guru Nanak had no objection. He was willing to keep company with those who had faith in God. However, when they commenced the prayers, Guru Nanak stood aside and watched them with a smile on his lips. As soon as the prayers were over, the *qazi* asked Guru Nanak, 'Why didn't you join us in prayers after agreeing to do so?' Guru Nanak told him

politely, 'I did not join you because all the while you were saying the prayers, your mind was in your filly left loose back at your place. You feared that she might fall into the well in your courtyard.' The qazi heard it and was silenced. ''In that case, you could have given me your company,' said the Nawab. 'But you were buying horses in Kabul,' observed Guru Nanak. The Nawab realised the truth of it. At this Guru Nanak said:

> Let God's grace be the mosque, and devotion the prayer-mat,
> Let Quran be the good conduct,
> Let modesty be compassion, good manners fasting,
> You should be a Musalman the like of this.
> Let good deeds be your Kaaba and truth be your mentor.
> Your Karma be your creed and prayer.
> God would then vidicate your honour. (Majh)

It is no wonder that well-meaning Hindus and Muslims both held Guru Nanak in great esteem. The Muslim treated him as *Waliallah*—a beloved of God—and until the other day a large number of Hindus of the Punjab had at least one child in the family baptised as a Sikh, following the teachings of Guru Nanak.

The means of communication being what they were during his time, Guru Nanak undertook several journeys to the north, south, east and west with a view to carrying his message of brotherhood of man and unity of God by word of mouth. In the east, he went as far as Nagaland. In the south, he visited even Sri Lanka and Lakshadweep. In the north, he crossed Kashmir and penetrated deep into the Himalayas upto Manasarovar, meeting ascetics who had withdrawn themselves from the world. And in the west, there is historical evidence that he went as far as Baghdad. All these arduous journeys helped in fostering understanding and amity. Wherever he went, he is remembered and revered even today.

While journeying towards east, Guru Nanak is said to have visited Gorakhmata, a shrine devoted to Gorakh Nath, not very far from Pilibhit. The ascetics here had a fierce argument with Guru Nanak. They were, at last, completely won over. It is a place of pilgrimage even today. This is what Guru Nanak told them:

Asceticism doesn't lie in the ascetic robes,
Nor in the walking staff, nor in the ashes.
Asceticism doesn't lie in the earring,
Nor in the shaven head, nor in blowing a conch.
Asceticism lies in remaining pure amidst impurities.
(Suhi)

On his way back from Assam, Guru Nanak returned via Orissa visiting the famous temple of Jagannath at Puri. It is one of the most important places of Hindu pilgrimage. Guru Nanak found that the priests of the temple attached more importance to rituals than to true faith in God. They made elaborate arrangements to propitiate the deity with trays full of burning candles, flowers and all sorts of perfumery a number of times a day. They called it *arati*. But none of the devotees joining the ritual had his heart in it. Guru Nanak withdrew from the empty ritual and, sitting outside the temple, started singing, with Mardana accompanying him on the rabab:

The sky is the tray,
The sun and the moon are the lights
And stars the jewels.
Sandalwood's fragrance is the incense,
The wind is the fly-whisk
And all the forests your flowers.
What a wonderful *arati* it is! (Dhanasri)

In the meantime the priests and pilgrims had collected around Gur Nanak and they were thrilled to hear him sing the praises of God.

When Guru Nanak arrived at Mecca, he felt tired. It

had been a long and strenuous journey to the holy city. He fell asleep and it so happened that he slept with his feet towards Kaaba, the holy shrine, instead of his head, which was the accepted practice. At midnight Jiwan, the watchman, on his rounds noticed this and was scandalised to find a pilgrim with his feet pointing towards the House of God. 'How dare you lie with your feet pointing towards God?' he shouted. He was about to lay his corrective hands on Nanak when the Guru woke up. 'My good man, I am weary after a long journey. Kindly turn my feet in the direction where God is not.' Jiwan was stunned. 'Where God is not!' His head started whirling. 'Where God is not!' He saw His abode in all the four directions. He had lifted Nanak's feet and rather than turning them around, his head fell on them. He started kissing them. He washed Guru Nanak's feet with his tears. The rest of the pilgrims and the holy men of the shrine were delighted to have Guru Nanak amidst them. They asked him many questions. 'I am neither a Hindu nor a Musalman,' said Guru Nanak. 'Who is superior of the two?' the pilgrims who by then had collected around him wished to know. Guru Nanak replied, "Without good deeds, neither is good.' The Guru laid stress on the love of God, humility, prayer and truthful living. He then recited a hymn in Persian:

I beseech You, O Lord! pray grant me a hearing.
You are the truthful, the great, the merciful, and the faultless Creator.
I know for certain, this world must perish,
And death must come, I know this and nothing else.
Neither wife, nor son, nor father, nor brother shall be able to help.
I must go in the end, none could undo what is written in my lot.
I have spent days and nights in vanity contemplating evil.
Never have I thought of good; this is what I am,
I am ill-starred, miserly, careless, short-sighted and rude.

But I am yours, the dust of the feet of your minions.
(Tilang)

What Guru Nanak disapproved most vehemently was casteism that had petrified Hindu society since time immemorial. A person born in a low caste was condemned to all sorts of discrimination in life. Through years of living together, the virus of the caste system had inevitably penetrated into Muslim society as well. There were *Syeds* and *Maulvis, Sheikhs* and *Mussallis* among them. Guru Nanak would have none of it.

Early in his life once Guru Nanak happened to visit Saidpur. He chose to stay with Bhai Lalo, a carpenter. It so happened that the day Guru Nanak arrived, Malik Bhago, the chief of the town, who had amassed untold wealth, was holding a sacrificial feast to which all the holy men were invited. Guru Nanak decided to remain away and partook of the simple fare of his host. When Malik Bhago came to know of it, he was furious. Guru Nanak didn't care a bit. As for wordly wealth, he maintained:

It cannot be collected without unfair means
And when you die, it doesn't go with you.

Unlike Mahavira and Buddha, Nanak was not born to affluent parents. He was the son of a village *patwari*, at the lowest rung of the revenue hierarchy. While playing in the company of children he always made friends with the poor and the so-called low castes. After his Revelation at Sultanpur, to whomsoever came to him, his message was simple: One must work and share one's earnings with others and an active life is superior to a life of sheer contemplation.

His sympathies were always with the poor and the have-nots. He suffered with suffering humanity. During Babar's invasion of India, Guru Nanak witnessed frightful killings. The poet in him seems to have revolted against divine justice. Guru Nanak has left a remarkable piece of

poetry describing the barbarous attack and the sufferings of the people of the Punjab:

He occupied Khurasan and subdued Hindustan,
God! Don't You blame Yourself for having sent the Mughal like a doom?
Seeing such killing and wailing, didn't it hurt You, O Lord?
You are the lone Creator of all.
If an aggressor were to kill an aggressor
I wouldn't complain.
But when a fierce lion falls on a poor herd of cattle
The master must take the blame.... (Asa)

It needed no small courage to say all this about a foreign invader who was there to settle down and lay the foundations of an empire. Babarvani has a number of other compositions also which condemn both the invader and the Godless, corrupt Hindu society of the day that had invited trouble on itself:

They who had beautiful locks and the vermilion dye in the parting of their hair
Have their tresses shorn with scissors and dust thrown on their heads.
They wouldn't remember Ram
They can't take the name of Allah now. (Asa)

During the close of his ministry, Guru Nanak settled down at Kartarpur on the banks of the river Ravi. It was a new township established by the Guru himself on a tract of land placed at his disposal by one of his followers. It is said that Kartarpur was the first ever experiment in community living. They tilled the land, Guru Nanak included, and ate from a common kitchen. Khushwant Singh observes in his *History of the Sikhs*:

"The *bhaktas* had paid only lip service to the ideal of casteless society, Nanak took practical steps to break the vicious hold of caste by starting a free community

kitchen—*Guru Ka Langar*—in all centres and persuading his followers, irrespective of their castes, to eat together."

Guru Nanak identified himself with the lowest of the low. He refers to himself as 'Nanak, the servant', 'Nanak, the low-caste', 'Nanak, the humble'. Integration is best ensured when the man at the top starts from the bottom. Says Guru Nanak:

Among the low, let my caste be the lowest.
Of the lowly, let me the lowliest be.
O Nanak, let such be the men I know,
With such men let me keep company.
Why must I try to emulate the big? (Majh)

II

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE MASTER

He ascended the throne of Guru Nanak,
The Guru's spirit entering the disciple.

This is how Bhai Gurdas, one of the earliest Sikh chroniclers, describes Guru Angad's installation as the second Sikh Guru. It is believed that on being named a successor, the divine light of Guru Nanak travelled to all those who came after him one after another. Accordingly, they styled themselves as Nanak, some of them adopting it even as their *nom de plume*.

Looking back, Guru Angad found that he had inherited a maginificent tradition of communal amity and understanding.

Unlike other *bhaktas, sufis* and saints, Guru Nanak did not take a simplistic view of communal harmony. He did not intend a superficial synthesis of Hinduism and Islam. It was not a case of revaluation, rejecting some and accepting some other features in either faith and then amalgamating them. More than horizontal intermingling which had its own virtues, Guru Nanak laid stress on vertical elevation of society and spiritual coalescing of the two communities. He wanted Hindus to be good Hindus and Muslims to be good Muslims. Wherever he went, he set up *manjis*, where his followers could congregate regularly, both Hindus and Muslims, and remember God.

Guru Nanak had also rejected Sanskrit and Persian for communication. He opted for the language of the people with a fair dose of local dialects. Adoption of their

language brought him closer to the people. Propagation of the mother-tongue obliterated differences in the various communities and provided them with a common platform. A common language can be a mighty cementing force. The Hindus were drifting away to Sanskrit and the Muslims were taking to Persian more and more. Bhaktas like Guru Nanak helped stem this tendency. The gulf was bridged to a great extent. The protagonists of the Bhakti Movement evolved a link language called *Sadhukari*, spoken and popularised by the saint-poets in mediaeval times.

Not only this, Guru Nanak adopted poetic forms that were popular with the people at large. Their metres and measures followed the folksongs and folk ballads that the common people were familiar with. Guru Nanak tried *Siharfi, Baramah, Kafi* and several other moulds popular with Muslims as also *Chhanda, Ashtapadi, Doha* and *Sloka* in the best tradition of Hindu classical poetry.

He drew his similes from the everyday life of the common man. He employed familiar symbols like the spinning-wheel, the bride and the parent's house, etc., though with a freshness of approach.

Since it is easy to remember poetry, easier to convey it by word of mouth, all his writings that Guru Nanak had bequeathed to his followers are in verse. Not only this, almost all his poetry can be sung to music. The text conforms to specific ragas prevalent in the Hindustani style of music of the day. Where Guru Nanak followed better-known musical forms of folk ballads, he made it a point to mention the fact in the beginning of the composition that it was designed to be sung in such and such tune in the style of such and such ballad. For instance, in the opening of *Asa di Var*, a longish work sung by the Sikh community every morning as a divine service, it is stated:

> The *Var* with *slokas* is written by the First Guru
> and should be sung to the air of *Tunda Asraja*.

Guru Nanak combined in himself a recluse, an ascetic and a family man who married and had children. He was the fond brother of a sister. He was a dutiful husband. He was a loving father. And yet he was unduly attached to none. When the time came to nominate his successor, Guru Nanak felt that neither of his sons qualified for the honour. Here was the greatest test of his life. His sons aspired to succeed him. One of them had never married and lived the life of an ascetic. Guru Nanak did not approve of it. He attached greater importance to normal family life. He, therefore, ordained one of his followers, who had come to stay with him, as the next Guru. Lehna by name, he was blessed by Nanak with his *ang* (hand) and he became Guru Angad.

One Malu Shah, an orderly in the Mughal army, came to Guru Angad for spiritual guidance. The Guru was aware that the Mughals were going through bad times. He advised Malu Shah to remain loyal to his master and serve his King devotedly, more so in his adversity.

Humayun had succeeded Babar on the Mughal throne but he was soon overpowered by Sher Shah. As he was being hounded out, he came over to Khadur to seek Guru Angad's blessings. It so happened that, when he arrived, the Guru was sitting in a congregation listening to hymns being sung by the devotees. The Mughal King had, therefore, to wait for a while. Humayun felt slighted and losing his temper put his hand on the hilt of his sword, threatening to attack the Guru. Guru Angad remained unperturbed and calm as ever. He chided Humayun: 'When you should have used the sword, you did not, rather you ran away from the battle-field like a coward. Here with a dervish, you show off, threatening to attack unarmed devotees engaged in prayer.' Humayun heard it and was full of remorse. He wished to be pardoned. Guru Angad reminded him about Guru Nanak's prophecy.

"They come in '78 and go in '97. Another man of

sword will also arise."*

The Guru told him that he must leave the country in his own interest and as foreseen by the Great Guru he would return to his throne shortly thereafter. History is witness to it that Humayun attacked India in due course and regained his throne.

Guru Angad was fond of children and took great interest in them. He collected children, organised games for them and distributed prizes. He devoted equal attention to their proper education. He insisted that children should be taught in their mother-tongue and to that end he is said to have simplified and codified the Gurmukhi script, and popularised its use amongst the Sikhs. This, perhaps, is the most important contribution of Guru Angad. While the origin of Gurmukhi script continues to be disputed, there is no doubt that Guru Angad gave a lead in making an extensive use of the script in his time. He got a number of copies of Guru Nanak's *Bani* made in the Gurmukhi script consisting of 35 letters.

When the time came for Guru Angad to name his successor, he installed Guru Amar Das, one of his devotees, as the next Guru. Guru Angad's two sons didn't like the decision. They had their own ambitions. Guru Angad told them that the honour must go to the one who deserved it most.

Said Satta, a bard of the Guru's household:
"The brotherhood was delighted to see
Guru Nanak's umbrella over Amar Das's head."

He was 73 when Guru Amar Das was ordained. A mere devotee who prided himself on being the humblest

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* The prophecy relates to the Mughals occupying India in *Samvat* 1578 (1521 A.D.) and departing in *Samvat* 1597 (1540 A.D.). The monarch who was driven out was Humayun and the "man of the sword" referred to is Sher Shah, who had thrown him out.

servant of the Guru, living where the Guru desired him to live, doing what the Guru asked him to do, he was raised to the supreme status of the Master who had to provide leadership to innumerable followers far and near.

Guru Nanak had laid stress on *sangat*. The Sikhs must congregate both in the morning and evening and sing praises of the Almighty. Guru Amar Das streamlined the practice by setting up 22 *manjis* (dioceses) formally presided over by devout Sikhs. With a view to spreading Guru Nanak's message far and wide, he trained a band of 146 apostles, of whom 52 were women, to go to various parts of the country and attend to the spiritual needs of the Guru's followers.

However, Guru Amar Das's most distinguished contribution was the concept of *pangat*. The Sikhs must sit and eat together. He set up a free kitchen where everyone, irrespective of caste and creed, was welcome. In fact, the Guru made it obligatory on all those seeking his audience first to eat in the *langar* and then go to see him. This helped in ridding Hindu society of the evil of the caste system and brought the Hindus and the Muslims closer and fostered communal harmony.

The Guru also tried to eradicate social evils like *sati*, which required a Hindu widow to burn herself on her husband's funeral pyre or the widow remaining unmarried for the rest of her life after the death of her husband.

As the message of Guru Nanak spread, more and more people visited Goindwal, the city established by Guru Amar Das. It became a flourishing town and a number of Muslim dignitaries also came and settled there.

During one of his visits to Lahore, Emperor Akbar was crossing the river Beas. He decided to make a slight detour and visit Goindwal to pay homage to Guru Amar Das about whom he had heard a great deal. To see the Guru, even the Emperor had to partake of food in the *langar* like any other visitor. It is said that the Emperor sat with the lowliest of the low and ate with them and then had an

audience with the Guru. Akbar was highly impressed at the meeting and wished to grant a *jagir* to the Guru for the maintenance of the free kitchen. The Guru would not agree to it. 'We start afresh every morning. Nothing is saved for the next day,' said the Guru. 'The rations are brought by the devotees daily and are distributed among them every day.' The Emperor insisted upon making the grant in appreciation of the great humanitarian work being done by the Guru. Since the Guru would not accept any favour from the King, Akbar thought of a way out. 'I can, at least, present a few villages to your daughter, Bhani, who is as much my daughter, as a wedding gift.' The Guru could not decline it and the King had his way. It was at this spot that Amritsar, the renowned Sikh centre, came to be established in due course.

It is said that the orthodox Hindus complained to the King that Guru Amar Das was violating their time-honoured practices by rejecting Sanskrit and decrying their rituals and religious practices, etc. The guru listened to the King's suggestions in the interest of communal harmony and agreed to visit Hindu places of pilgrimage. He found God everywhere. The King, on his part, went out of his way to exempt the Guru and whosoever followed him from the pilgrim tax. It is said, wherever the Guru went, he attracted large crowds. The Guru's slogan, *Sat Nam Sri Wahguru*, resounded all over.

'You are Nanak, you are Lehna, you are Amar Das,' Satta the bard sang when Guru Ram Das succeeded as the fourth Sikh Guru of the Sikhs. Guru Ram Das's ministry was short-lived, a period of seven years only. After he had been ordained as the Guru, Guru Ram Das who was the son-in-law of Guru Amar Das started building a new township on the jagir gifted to his wife Bibi Bhani by Akbar. This new township is what came to be known as Amritsar. The name Amritsar, by which the premier seat of the Sikh community is known, is derived from the holy tank called Amritsar—the pool of nectar, around which

the town grew.

Guru Ram Das wanted to provide the community with a nucleus, but he could neither complete the holy tank nor start constructing the Golden Temple on its present site because he left this world rather early in life, handing over the stewardship of the community to his youngest son Guru Arjan Dev, a sensitive poet and scholar of eminence.

About Guru Arjan, his own grandfather, Guru Amar Das, had said:

"This grandson of mine
Will cruise people across the ocean of life."

Though Guru Amar Das had indicated beyond any doubt that Guru Arjan Dev would be ordained the Guru in due course, his eldest brother, Prithi Chand, was never reconciled to the position and he created no end of trouble for him. He started intriguing and conspiring against the Guru. Guru Arjan didn't take much notice of him. He was busy completing a number of tasks left unfinished by Guru Ram Das.

Guru Arjan had the foundation-stone of Harimandir, later known as the Golden Temple, laid by Mian Mir, a Muslim divine of Lahore. The Sikhs desired that it should be the tallest building in town. The Guru, however, thought otherwise. He reminded his followers that there was no virtue like humility. The temple was, therefore, built on as low an elevation as possible. He also decided to have the new temple open on all four sides. Anyone could enter it from any side. No one might be discriminated against.

As he was busy looking after the construction of the Holy Tank and the Holy Temple, reports came to Guru Arjan that Prithi Chand, his eldest brother had started composing his own hymns and was passing them to the Sikhs visiting Amritsar as the compositions of Guru Nanak and other Sikh Gurus. If this was allowed, Guru Arjan feared, it would be the undoing of the faith. He therefore, decided to compile the authentic texts of hymns of the four

Gurus preceding him along with his own. The compilation when completed came to be known as *Pothi*, the *Holy Granth*. Consistent with the tradition of the faith, Guru Arjan had a good number of spiritual verses of other Indian saints, both Hindu and Muslim, also collected and included in the compilation. It was a rare act of communal amity for which it is hard to find a parallel anywhere else.

However, Prithi Chand was not to be deterred. He complained to the Mughal Court that the *Holy Granth* had derogatory references to Muslim and Hindu prophets and saints. Akbar had it looked into and found that there was no truth in the complaint. He was delighted to be acquainted with the highly inspiring volume compiled by the Guru. He bestowed robes of honour on the Sikhs who had carried the *Holy Granth* to the King and sent numerous gifts to the Guru. He also promised to pay his respects personally to the Guru when he visited Lahore next.

The Emperor kept his promise and came on pilgrimage to Amritsar. He was greatly impressed with the activities of the Guru. He made rich offerings and sought the Guru's blessings for the peace and welfare of his Kingdom. At the Guru's intervention he exempted the region from land revenue, as it had suffered a severe drought that year.

Unfortunately, a monarch of vision like Akbar did not live long. He was followed by his son Jehangir on the throne, though Akbar had nominated his grandson, Khusro, to succeed him.

Jehangir was pleasure-loving. He was given to drinking. He left the administration of the Kingdom to his Queen and his courtiers. While on his way to Kashmir, the Emperor summoned Guru Arjan to meet him at Lahore. He asked the Guru to revise the *Holy Granth* deleting all references to Islam and Hinduism figuring in it. How could the Guru agree to it? He was, therefore, fined rupees two lakhs. The Guru told the King that his money was the sacred trust of the Sikh community and the hymns in the *Holy Granth* were a revelation in praise of God; no one

dare alter them. The King was on his way to Kashmir. He was in a hurry and in no mood to involve himself in argument.

In the meanwhile the *qazi* gave his injunction ordering the Guru to be tortured to death, in case he did not agree to expunge the so-called derogatory references to Islam and Hinduism in the *Holy Granth*.

It is said, the Guru was made to sit on a red hot iron sheet. They poured hot sand on his body. He was given a dip in boiling water. As the Guru was being persecuted thus, Mian Mir, the Muslim divine of Lahore who had laid the foundation-stone of the Holy Temple at Amritsar, came and begged the Guru to allow him to use his mystic power to undo those who were responsible for the suffering inflicted upon him. The Guru heard Mian Mir and counselled patience. He told him that one must accept the will of God; not a leaf moves if God doesn't ordain it.

The Guru was tortured for five days. When they found him bearing all the agony with perfect equanimity, they became helpless. They were at a loss to know what to do. At this the Guru asked for a bath in the river Ravi by the side of the Mughal fort in which he was imprisoned. Thousands of his followers watched the Guru walk to the river with tears in their eyes. His bare body glistened with blisters. There were blisters on his feet and he couldn't even walk properly. 'Sweet is Your will, O God; the gift of Your Name alone I seek,' said the Guru again and again. As he reached the river, he bade farewell to his devotees and walked into the water as serene and as calm as ever. It is said, it was the last glimpse his devotees had of the Master. He never came out of the river. The tide bore him in her longing lap and he was gone for ever.

With Guru Arjan's martyrdom, the attitude of Sikhs to life changed. Emulating their Guru, they would readily give their lives for any cause dear to them, whether it was for the protection of their faith, freedom of the country or the integrity of the motherland.

In Guru Arjan we have the culmination of all that Guru Nanak and the three Gurus following him stood for. They combined in themselves the best of Islam and the best of Hinduism. Rather than alienating anyone, they strove for mutual understanding. Venerated equally by the Muslims and the Hindus, they were peace-loving, devoted to meditation and prayers and service of their fellow-beings.

Guru Arjan's martyrdom precipitated the issue. It gave a new complexion to the shape of things in the Punjab and the Sikh polity. While Guru Arjan's non-violence and the way he made the supreme sacrifice reflect the best in Guru Nanak, the training he gave to his successor, Hargobind, was a sign-post of a long drawn-out conflict that followed, culminating in a momentous turbulence during Guru Gobind Singh's life and times.

III

THE SAINT-SOLDIERS

To a student of Guru Arjan's life, the Guru's martyrdom was an inevitability. The forces of evil and hatred were relentless. Events moved with calamitous certainty. The Guru had attended to all his major assignments. The completion of the Holy Tank called Amritsar and the Harimandir, later known as the Golden Temple, attracted Sikh pilgrims from far and near. The town which rose around the Holy Tank grew into a metropolis of the Sikhs. The *Holy Granth* has not only preserved the Holy Word; it has served as a spiritual lighthouse ever since its compilation.

Accepting the will of God, Guru Arjan gave up his life, suffering inhuman atrocities in a non-violent manner. Yet the last message he sent to his son was to arm himself fully and prepare for the struggle ahead which was to be a long drawn-out war against evil and tyranny. It steeled the heart of his youthful son Hargobind, who had succeeded his father as the sixth Sikh Guru.

It is said, when Bhai Buddha, the grand old man of the Sikh brotherhood, brought him *seli*, the sacred headgear of renunciation that Guru Nanak had worn and had bequeathed to his successors one after another, Guru Hargobind put it aside respectfully and asked for a sword instead. Bhai Buddha, who had never handled a sword, brought out one and put it on the wrong side. The Guru noticed it and asked for another. 'I'll wear two swords,' said the Guru, ' a sword of *shakti* (power) and a sword of *bhakti* (meditation).'

Guru Hargobind combined in him *piri* (renunciation)

and *miri* (royalty). Henceforth the Guru's Sikhs were to carry arms and ride horses. It gave birth to a new concept of the saint-soldier.

No more did the Sikhs believe in self-denial alone, they grew increasingly aware of the need for self-assertion also. No more self-abnegation and renunciation alone, they wielded arms and lived an active life. They wouldn't frighten anyone, nor were they afraid of anybody. They reared horses, rode on them and racing and hunting became their pastime. The Guru maintained a regular army with various cadres. The heroic youth joined him in large numbers, irrespective of caste and creed. The Sikhs all over presented the Guru with best horses and finest weapons as their offerings. The Guru built forts and battlements, donned a royal aigrette and was known as *Sacha Padshah*, the True King.

All this was duly reported to the King who summoned the Guru to Delhi to have a heart-to heart talk. The Monarch had a guilty conscience on account of Guru Arjan's martyrdom. It is said, the moment Jehangir saw Guru Hargobind, he was completely won over by his youthful charm and spiritual halo. Among other questions, the King asked the Guru which religion was better—Hinduism or Islam. In his reply the Guru quoted from the *Holy Granth*:

God first created light
All men are born out of it.
The whole world emanated from a single spark;
Who is good and who is bad?
The Creator is in His creation
And the creation in the Creator.
He is everywhere;
The clay is the same
The potter fashions models as he fancies.

(Parbhati—Kabir)

The King was deeply impressed. He had also been told

that the Guru was a great lover of sports. He invited Guru Hargobind to a tiger hunt. The Guru accepted the invitation gladly. It happened that during the chase the King was attacked by a ferocious tiger. The sportsmen accompanying the royal party lost their nerve. Their horses and elephants panicked. The bullets and arrows shot at the tiger missed the target and for a moment it appeared that the beast was going to pounce upon the King. At this Guru Hargobind rushed his horse and, pulling out his sword, he engaged the tiger single-handed. The next moment the tiger lay slain on the ground. The King was full of gratitude. He admired the way the Guru risked his life and the heroic fight he gave to save the King.

The Emperor became so fond of the Guru that he invited him to accompany him on his next tour of his Kingdom. The Guru's tent was always pitched close to the royal tent. While visiting Agra one day, the King was sitting under a tree. A poor grass-cutter, who had heard about the Guru's visit along with the King, came and, making an offering of a two-paisa coin, pleaded, 'You are the True King. I am a poor sinner. Help me wash my sins and attain deliverance from the cycle of life and death.' The Monarch heard him and smiled, 'The True King is in yonder tent,' saying these words, he directed the grass-cutter to the Guru's tent. Jehangir realized that the True King indeed was one who gave eternal peace and deliverance.

While at Agra, the King was taken seriously ill. The court physicians tried their best but could not cure him. The King decided to consult his astrologers. Chandu Shah, a dignitary who had nursed a grouse against the Guru for not having accepted the hand of his daughter for his son, conspired with the astrologers. They told the King that his malady was due to an unfavourable conjunction of stars. It could be remedied if a holy man went to Gwalior Fort and offered continuous prayers to the deity there. Who could be holier than Guru Hargobind, the King's new

friend? It was, therefore, decided to request the Guru to go to Gwalior and undertake the penance on behalf of the King. The Guru was aware of Chandu's intrigue; nevertheless, he readily agreed to the proposal and accompanied by an escort of five lieutenants left for Gwalior Fort. The Guru's Sikhs both at Delhi and Amritsar were unhappy to hear it. As it happened, a section of Gwalior Fort was used as a prison. The princes detained in the fort were highly pleased to have the Guru with them. Guru Hargobind found that they were in a deplorable plight. He had their living conditions improved. He invited them to join him in prayers both in the morning and in the evening. In the meanwhile Chandu wrote to Hari Das, the governor of the Fort, asking him to poison the Guru somehow. He must be avenged for the indignity he had suffered owing to the Guru's refusal to accept the hand of his daughter. Chandu was not aware that the governor was an ardent devotee of the Guru. Hari Das brought the letter and placed it before Guru Hargobind.

Before long the Monarch fully recovered and the Guru was invited back to the court. But the Guru would not leave the Fort unless the princes detained in the Fort were released. The King could not agree to it. They were either political prisoners or had been detained for default in the payment of large sums of tribute due from them. After a while the King was made to realise that he owed his recovery to the Guru's prayers. It would be the height of ingratitude if he ignored the Guru's request. He, therefore, agreed to the release of the princes. The Guru left the Fort along with 52 Hindu princes who were languishing in the prison for several years. A part of Gwalior Fort, where the Guru stayed, is still known as Bandi Chhor, the liberator of the detained.

When the King met the Guru to thank him, the Guru told the Monarch that there was no such thing as the unfavourable conjunction of planets. He also acquainted him with Chandu's villainy. The King was already aware

of Chandu's perfidy in intriguing to have Guru Arjan tortured to death. In a fit of fury, he handed Chandu over to the Guru to avenge the murder of his father.

When the King heard about the Guru's desire to return home, he suggested that he might delay his departure for a few days so that they could travel together. The King wished to spend the summer in Kashmir that year.

During the journey, Guru Hargobind's tent was invariably next to the King's. It is said Nur Jehan, the Queen, took a fancy for the Guru and visited him with her confidante a couple of times. She was said to be the most charming beauty of her time. The Guru told her that the real charm of a woman was her virtue and her devotion to her husband. Nur Jehan was enchanted to hear the Guru's words.

An old woman named Bhagbhari, who lived in Srinagar made with her own hands a fine silk robe and longed to present it to the Guru. But the Guru was hundreds of miles away in the Punjab, how would he know about it? The devotee in Bhagbhari, however, was undeterred. The Guru must visit her to receive the gift. Her faith was not belied. Before long she had the Guru visiting her. The first thing he came and asked for was the robe that she had made after years of labour, remembering the Guru every moment.

On his way to Srinagar, Guru Hargobind spent a night with Kattu Shah, a devotee in a village. Hearing that the Divine Master was visiting Kashmir, some of the Sikhs from an out-of-the-way village came to pay homage to him. They too happened to spend a night with Kattu Shah. When he learnt that they were carrying a jar of special honey for the Guru, Kattu Shah asked them again and again to let him taste it. The Sikhs who had collected the honey for their Guru would not let Kattu Shah touch the pot, to say nothing of allowing him to taste it. When they arrived in Srinagar and made their offering to the Guru, it was discovered much to their embarrassment that the

honey had decomposed. It started stinking. The Guru told them that they should not have refused Kattu Shah—the Guru's Sikh—to taste the honey on their way to Srinagar.

About this time Jehangir died and he was succeeded by Shah Jehan.

A devotee in Kabul hearing that the Guru was fond of horses, purchased for him a rare charger. It cost him a lakh of rupees. While crossing the river Attock, the local official noticed the elan of the charger and was fascinated. He must take possession of the horse for the King. As the Sikh entered Lahore with the prize horse, it was captured by the King's men.

After some time it so happened that the King and the Guru were hunting in the same jungle. Shah Jehan had a rare white hawk presented to him by the King of Iran. Somehow the Guru's party caught hold of the hawk and would not return it. Besides when the King's men came to collect the hawk, the Sikhs gave them a severe beating and drove them away saying, 'We will not return the hawk for the fear of anyone—even the King.' In fact, the Sikhs wished to avenge themselves for the Mughal soldiers appropriating the charger sent to the Guru by a devotee in Kabul.

How could a King allow it? A few days later when he was busy in preparations for his daughter's marriage, Amritsar was attacked by Mukhlis Khan under the orders of Shah Jehan. It was a challenge that had to be met. Mukhlis Khan who thought that he would get the King's hawk and the Guru's head by the evening, lost his entire force in the fight.

Before long there was another skirmish with Mughal forces at Kartarpur where the royal soldiers were again routed.

While still at Kartarpur, Guru Hargobind one day went out hunting and came across an enchanting spot on the banks of the river Beas. The Guru decided to found a new township called Hargobindpur there. Before the comple-

tion of the town, the Guru made sure that along with the gurdwara, a mosque was also constructed in the town.

The royal hawk was still with the Guru. It became a bone of contention. In the meanwhile a party of Masands visiting Kabul were bringing along with them Dilbagh and Gulbagh, two rare chargers. The horses could cross a river without the rider getting wet. They were so swift that in a race their legs didn't seem to touch the ground. On their way to Amritsar, the horses were seized by the Mughal officials and made over to the Governor.

This unfortunate incident led to another fight since the Guru's Sikhs somehow had both the horses retrieved. In this skirmish also, the Mughal forces were mauled and they fled the battle-field in utter disarray as never before.

Painda Khan was one of the most pampered Sardars of Guru Hargobind. He was not only tall and handsome, he was the strongest man in the Guru's army. The Guru was immensely fond of him. He bestowed gifts on him every now and then. He had the best uniform, the best horses, and the best treatment. It seemed it turned his head. He started intriguing. He went to the Mughal Court and offered to join the Imperial army. Since he knew all the secrets of the Guru's forces, he received a warm welcome. Painda Khan's strength was legendary. He, it is said, could fight an elephant and with his thumb could pulverise a coin. Painda Khan told the Mughals that the Guru's army comprised the poor and the low castes, the diseased and the disabled; they were weavers and washermen, barbers and ballad-singers.

It was, therefore, decided to send a force under Kale Khan against the Guru. He was to be supported by Painda Khan. It was again a bloody fight with heavy carnage. The battle cost the Guru seven hundred of his brave soldiers, while the loss to the Mughal army was heavier, including the killing of Painda Khan, Kale Khan and several other renowned soldiers.

Immediately after the Mughal forces withdrew, the

Guru, along with his family and close associates, left for Kiratpur. Budhan Shah, a Muslim divine, had been promised a visit by the Guru before his death. And the Guru felt that Budhan Shah's end was near. Another factor that probably prevailed with the Guru to retire to an out-of-the-way, quiet town was his anxiety to avoid further bloodshed.

Guru Hargobind kept his grandson Har Rai always in his company. Evidently, he was grooming him for the succession.

Guru Hargobind was a tall, handsome man of a fine build and was given to active life. He was fond of hunting and never evaded fighting if he must. He was a leader of his men and a hero on the battle-field. Like a true soldier, he avoided aggression as far as possible, but when he found himself faced with evil, he struck heavily and a fighter for right causes, every time he came out with flying colours. However, sensitive that he was, the bloodshed and the carnage on the battle-field made him unhappy. Advising his successor that he should keep only 2,200 mounted soldiers for his defence, he bemoaned the loss of many a fine soldier and *Sardar* and passed away contemplating why wars could not be eliminated from the world.

Guru Hargobind's greatest contribution is that he gave a new turn to the Sikh way of life. He turned saints into soldiers and yet remained a man of God. He believed that non-violence is cowardice if it is resorted to out of helplessness or fear. It is the brave and heroic who can be non-violent. Essentially a spiritual leader of a community hardly a hundred years old, he fought a number of battles with the Imperial forces and every time vanquished his foe because the truth was always on his side. It was always a fight in self-defence and never a war of aggression. This new trend that he gave to Sikh polity found its finest expression in his grandson Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru.

Guru Har Rai was just 14 years old when he became

the seventh Sikh Guru. In fact, he was nominated for succession because his father Bhai Gurditta had died an untimely death. He was Guru Hargobind's eldest son.

Guru Hargobind detested miracle-making. He felt that it was interfering with the ways of God. Once it so happened that one of Baba Atal's playmates was bitten by a snake and died. Baba Atal was another son of the Guru. He would not believe it and in all his innocence approached the dead body and said, 'Mohan, get up, you owe me a turn in the game.' It is said that the dead youth opened his eyes at the call and walked off to play with his companion! When Guru Hargobind came to know about it, he was distressed. 'How can anyone interfere with the ways of God?' he asked. Baba Atal heard the reprimand and took it to heart. Sitting by the side of Kaulsar, he said his prayers and gave his life for the life he had saved.

When Shah Jehan heard about Guru Har Rai's succession, he too realised that it was best to make friends with the heroic and self-respecting community. Accordingly, when his son Dara Shikoh fell seriously ill, he approached the Guru for his blessings and the young prince is said to have been cured with a herb Guru Har Rai sent to Delhi.

But this amity with the Delhi Darbar was short-lived. Aurangzeb, the third son of King Shah Jehan, usurped the throne and chased Dara Shikoh, his eldest brother away. While in fight, Dara Shikoh met Guru Har Rai. According to the tradition of the Guru's household, Guru Har Rai received the prince with due courtesy and gave him all the help that he needed. Dara Shikoh, who was a scholar and a God-fearing man, told the Guru that he was not at all interested in the Delhi throne and that he would be happier if he were left alone for spiritual pursuits. However, Aurangzeb captured Dara Shikoh and, having got him condemned by the *qazi* for deviating from the Islamic creed had him executed.

After Aurangzeb was firmly settled on the Mughal throne, he turned his attention to the Sikhs. An excuse was

readily available. The Guru had met Dara Shikoh, an enemy of the King, and blessed him.

Guru Har Rai passed away at the early age of 30 in 1661. Though the records are silent about it, the end must have come unexpectedly, probably owing to some fatal illness. But just before his death, he had his second son Harkrishan ordained as the Guru. The stewardship of Guru Har Rai and Guru Harkrishan was a sort of interregnum in the life of the Sikh community before it set on a new path of no compromise with injustice and evil.

Guru Tegh Bahadur who succeeded Guru Harkrishan was essentially contemplative by temperament. But the conditions in the Punjab and the rest of the country were such as would not allow him peace.

Though God-fearing and pious, Aurangzeb honestly believed that Hinduism was utterly misconceived, decadent and idolatrous. It was for their good if he could rid his people of superstitious and anti-God practices and thereby have the gates of heaven flung open to them.

Another factor that contributed to Aurangzeb's ill-conceived adventure was his anxiety to improve his image. He had imprisoned his own father and starved him to death. He had his brothers Dara Shikoh and Murad murdered. He grievously insulted his son Muazzim, who later on ascended the throne as Bahadur Shah. The Islamic world thought poorly of him. Aurangzeb wished to secure a berth for himself in the next world. He, therefore, decided to turn the country into Dar-ul-Islam, the abode of Muslims and issued instructions to his Governors to launch a mass conversion drive of Hindus.

In Kashmir, the Governor realized that Hindus had started fleeing his province. In this way, he felt, he would be left with hardly anyone to rule over. He, therefore, invited the leading brahmins of the community for a dialogue. He explained to them his helplesness in view of the firm orders from Delhi. After protracted discussion it was decided that the Hindu community should be given

six months to make up its mind.

Kashmiri brahmins decided to make a pilgrimage to Amarnath and seek intervention of the deity. It is said that while at the Amarnath temple, a member of the group of worshippers, Pandit Kirpa Ram, dreamt that they could be protected only by Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth in succession to Guru Nanak, who was the saviour in the Kaliyug. Immediately they left for the Punjab and reached Anandpur. They lost no time in explaining their predicament to the Guru. The Guru heard their tale of woe and was lost in deep contemplation when Gobind, his young son walked in. 'What is bothering you, dear father?' he asked. The Guru explained to him the situation. 'They can be saved only if a great soul can offer himself for martyrdom.' 'Then who is greater than you?' remarked the future saint-soldier of the Sikhs. The father was assured that Gobind was ready to take over. He advised the visiting supplicators to go back and inform their tormentors that they would be willing to accept Islam if Guru Tegh Bahadur could first be persuaded to do so.

The Guru was summoned to Delhi and put in jail. 'If you are a man of God, you must work a miracle,' the King said. The Guru would not purchase his release the way a juggler earned his living. Then the inevitable took place. The qazi gave his fatwa. And the Guru was executed. Thus, while Guru Nanak refused to wear the sacred thread, Guru Tegh Bahadur gave his life, so that the right of a community to wear the sacred thread and practise its faith was protected. This makes Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom unique in history. People gave their lives for principles dear to them, ideals cherished by them and faiths they held. There is hardly anyone who had staked his life for other people's faith. The supreme sacrifice made by Guru Tegh Bahadur stemmed the tide of intolerance in the sub-continent and inculcated in the people respect for other religions.

IV

BIRTH OF THE KHALSA

Guru Tegh Bahadur's execution in Delhi in public outraged the conscience of the entire Sikh brotherhood. After Guru Arjan Dev's martyrdom in Lahore, the slaughtering of another peace-loving, non-violent man of God like Guru Tegh Bahadur gave a rude shock to the young community. The Sikhs streamed towards Anandpur from far and near to be with the young Guru.

Born in Patna in 1666 and brought up for the grim struggle ahead, the young Gobind Rai rather than being overwhelmed by the tragic loss, evinced firm determination and tenacity of will to fight the forces of evil and bigotry in defence of the poor and the dharma. The disconsolate Sikhs who flocked to Anandpur, saw in their Guru the promised saviour and the man of the hour.

A soldier of destiny, the tenth Guru started consolidating his resources and preparing himself and his people for the gruesome fight until the poison that had permeated the body politic of the country had been completely rooted out. Guru Gobind realized the need to give the new religion a distinct identity. Islam under rulers like Aurangzeb had become rigid, narrow-minded and uncompromising and Hinduism had been enfeebled by ritualism.

As a first step, it was necessary to consolidate resources and manpower, which necessitated a discreet pause during which links were forged with Sikhs spread all over India and abroad including Kabul, Kandahar, Bulkh and Bokhara.

The Guru was visited by his followers who brought for him highly precious gifts. Duni Chand, a Sikh from Kabul,

brought a canopy that was worth rupees two and a half lakhs. During his visit to Assam, Guru Tegh Bahadur had blessed a ruler who was issuless. As a result a son was born to the ruler. While the raja had died, the queen came with the prince called Ratan Lal to pay homage to the Guru with various gifts including an elephant of uncanny intelligence. He carried out various commands to the delight of the spectators. He washed the Guru's feet with water and then wiped them with a towel. He fetched the arrows discharged by the Guru. At night he showed the way with lighted candles held in his trunk. He performed several other interesting feats.

The Guru practised archery, went out on shikar and played mock bottles with his companions. He had a huge drum made and collected his people, whenever he required them, by beat of drum.

The Guru also devoted himself to research, literary and artistic activity. He had 52 eminent poets working with him; poetic symposia were held frequently. The Guru, who was a scholar in Sanskrit and Persian, participated in them. His writings are a clear break with the tradition of his predecessors. He wrote powerful verse which is replete with images of war and warriors from ancient mythology and folklore. He worshipped God; he also had an unmistakable love of the sword.

The Guru had four sons—Ajit Singh, Jujhar singh, Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh. He gave them training in riding horses and handling arms and reading and interpreting classics. The schloars engaged by him were busy translating philosophical treatises from Sanskrit into the popular language of the common people.

For the Baisakhi fair in 1699, the Guru issued a general invitation to his Sikhs throughout the length and breadth of the country to visit Anandpur. He advised the Sikhs to come with unshorn hair. Several thousand Sikhs came to participate in the fair in response to the Guru's call.

On the morning of the main Fair day after the hymn-

singing had concluded, the Guru appeared on the dais with an unsheathed sword dazzling in his hand and asked the audience—'My sword is thirsty. It needs the blood of a Sikh to quench its thirst. Is there anyone in the audience who is willing to offer his head?' There was consternation amongst those present.

'Is there no one who is willing to present his head to satisfy my sword?' the Guru repeated.

The gathering grew more uneasy. 'Do I understand that there is none amongst my Sikhs who is willing to sacrifice his life for his Guru?' As the Guru repeated his call the third time, a Sikh called Daya Ram, a Khatri from Lahore of about 30 years of age, rose from the crowd to offer his head. 'It's yours in life and death', said the Sikh humbly. The Guru caught hold of him by his arm and led him to a tent pitched adjacent to the dais. There was a thud of the sword.

A moment later the Guru appeared, with his sword dripping with blood. 'I want another head,' shouted the Guru. There was panic in the audience. They even doubted if their leader was sane at all. Still before the Guru could repeat his call, another Sikh, this time a Jat from Haryana, rose and placed his head at the disposal of his Master. The Guru pulled him into the tent, in a strange frenzy. Again there was the thud of the sword followed by a stream of blood flowing out of the tent. And as before, the Guru came out of the tent with blood dripping from his sharp-edged sword.

'I want another head, the third'. He stood glowing with fiery eyes. Even at his first call, Mohkam Chand, a Sikh from far-off Dwarka, hurried to the scaffolding, apologising for his not offering himself earlier. The same frightful thud of the sword followed; and the red blood squirted out of the sacrificial tent. The thirst of the Guru's sword was still not quenched. He came out the fourth time demanding yet another head. The blade of his sword was stained with blood. Some people from the hysterical crowd

starting running away. 'I want the fourth head.' The Guru looked around and before he finished making this call, Himmat Chand, who had come all the way from Jagannathpuri in Orissa, rushed to the Guru. His head was at his Master's disposal. Like the other three Sikhs, he was also led to the tent. The thud of the sword was repeated and the stream of blood flowing from the tent was augmented with fresh blood. With blood dripping once again, the Guru asked for yet another head. By now the gathering had thinned considerably. Sahib Chand of Bidar, this time, rushed to the dais and fell at the Guru's feet for not responding to his call all the while. The Guru led the fifth Sikh also into the tent. Terror-stricken, some Sikhs ran to inform the Guru's mother, others thought of seeking the intervention of the Guru's senior advisers. They had gathered to celebrate the festival of Baisakhi;here the Guru had started butchering them. They were on the horns of a dilemma. They did not know what to do, when suddenly from behind the tent, they saw the five faithful Sikhs emerge one after another, radiant and beaming, like five resplendent stars descended from heaven! They were followed by the Guru glowing with a new confidence. The audience burst into spontaneous joy. They hailed the Guru with slogans—'The Guru is great!' 'Long live the Guru!' 'Glory to the Guru!' Shouting such slogans, they were going crazy when the Guru raised his hand and silenced them. 'Great are the Five Faithfuls ! Glory to them ! They are the chosen ones. They have found immortality. Those who know how to die, only they win deliverance from the cycle of life and death,' said the Guru.

The Guru, it is said, had slaughtered only goats. Every time he took a Sikh inside the tent, he slaughtered a goat and came out with its blood dripping from the blade of his sword.

The Guru, then, had a steel vessel brought and poured water into it. The Five Faithful Sikhs were asked to recite hymns from the sacred scriptures turn by turn, while the

Guru stirred the water with a double-edged dagger called *khanda*. The Guru was preparing *amrit*—nectar, to baptize Guru Nanak's Sikhs, to turn them into *Khalsa*—the elect. As the Five Faithful Sikhs were reciting the Holy Word clad in their blue robes of divine angels, Mata Sahib Devan came with *patashas*—sugarcandy—by way of her offering. The Guru was most happy. 'It is a timely gift,' he said and taking the *patashas* put them into the vessel. 'It is marrying valour to compassion,' said the Guru. 'The dagger was to turn the Sikhs into heroes, the sugarcandy will foster in them the milk of human kindness.'

When the recitation from the pre-determined text of the scripture was over, the Guru baptized the five beloved faithfuls with the nectar, the draught of immortality and knowledge sublime.

After the Sikhs had been thus baptized the Guru himself stood before them with hands folded and prayed to the Five Faithfuls to baptize him in return. Thus the Guru turned himself into a disciple. It was for the first time in the annals of history that the Master sat at the feet of his disciples asking them to be blessed with a draught of nectar. The moment he had the sublime sip, he became Guru Gobind Singh from Guru Gobind Rai. So were the Five Faithful Sikhs and thousands of the Guru's devotees who had gathered at Anandpur. According to the report of a diarist of the Mughal court to the Emperor in Delhi, 20,000 Sikhs were anointed on that blessed Baisakhi day. This was the birth of the Khalsa, the reincarnation of Guru Nanak's Sikhs. A draught of *amrit* and every Sikh became a Singh, a lion. Everyone had to sip amrit from a common vessel, therby joining them in eternal brotherhood and casting away the barriers of caste and creed.

The Guru then enjoined those who had been blessed with *amrit* to wear long hair (*kesh*). The hair is sacred. It is the symbol of the Khalsa, the pure. They were also to wear a steel bangle (*kada*) on their wrist. It should serve as a reminder of their commitment to truth. An annointed Sikh

must also wear short pants (*kachha*) to ensure cleanliness. The Sikh should have a comb (*kangha*) in the hair to keep it tidy. Also he should always carry a dagger (*kirpan*) as a weapon of defence.

The Guru was aware that the need of the hour was an army of saint-soldiers who could effectively fight the forces of evil, exploitation of the poor and communal hatred in Indian society.

The anointed Sikh was not to smoke or take to any other intoxicants. He must not eat kasher meat. He must be loyal to his spouse and not covet other women. All Sikhs were equal; there was no high or low caste amongst the Khalsa. The Khalsa believed in one God, said his prescribed prayers daily and did not worship idols or images. The Khalsa must help the needy and protect the poor.

The Sikhs who adopt the prescribed way of life are as good as the Guru. The Guru is the Khalsa and the Khalsa is the Guru.

After the grand baptism, the Guru declared that all his Sikhs were to be known as Singhs (lions). The baptism had turned jackals into tigers. The Khalsa must fight oppression. It is maintained that having been anointed with *amrit*, a single Sikh could fight a lakh and a quarter enemies.

And indeed the Sikhs did do this miracle. They fought fourteen times against the well disciplined imperial army—fourteen pitched battles—and not less than twelve times they defeated the enemy, made him withdraw, miserably mauled and routed.

Fighting against evil and injustice, Guru Gobind Singh suffered grievous losses personally. His father was martyred. His mother died in captivity. Two of his sons met their end one after another fighting single-handed against odds. Their father watched them from a battlement besieged by a rabid host. His two younger sons were walled in alive. Hundreds of his loyal lieutenants and thousands of his faithful followers gave their lives fighting for their Guru. His prize horses and precious manuscripts were

lost. There came a time when he was left all alone. Without a horse. Without any arms. With no attendant. Having wandered through hostile jungle, his clothes were torn. Walking day and night, his shoes were worn out. With thorns pricking his feet, lonely and forlorn, it is said, he reached Machhiwada jungle. He lay down on the bare earth with a stone for his pillow. It was here he sang what now is regarded as one of his most famous hymns:

Go tell the plight of His devotees to my beloved Lord.
The luxury of soft beds is agony without Him;
It's like living in a snake-pit,
The goblet is poison and the cup a dagger,
Life is like receiving a butcher's punches.
I would rather live in hiding, with my beloved.
It's hell living with strangers without Him.

He who lived like a prince in royal splendour was rendered homeless. He was being chased by the enemy forces from town to town, from wilderness to wilderness. Even then he was not demoralized. While camping at village Dinga, the Guru wrote a letter to Aurangzeb in response to his invitation to see him. The Guru's letter is known as *Zafar Nama*, the Epistle of Victory.

The Guru told the King that he had taken up arms because he had exhausted all other means of redress. The Guru continued:

"If I had not believed your word and your oath on the Quran, I wouldn't have left my town. If I had known that you are deceitful and crafty like a fox, I wouldn't have been here today...

"Every soldier of your army who left his defences to attack us was slaughtered...Many were done to death on either side with arrows and bullets showered on them. The whole earth was smeared with red blood. heads and legs lay in heaps. The arrows whizzed and bows twanged, the clamour all over reached heavens. My heroic soldiers fought like lions. But how could

forty men, even the bravest soldiers, succeed against countless odds?

"You are faithless and irreligious. You neither know God nor Muhammad. A religious man never breaks his promise. Had the prophet been here, I would make it a point to tell him about your treachery.

"What if my four sons have been killed, I live to take their revenge. It's no heroism to extinguish a few sparks. You have only excited a devastating fire.

"You have the pride of your empire, while I am proud of the Kingdom of God. You must not forget that this world is like a caravanserai and one must leave it sooner or later..."

The King received the Guru's letter and was struck with remorse. He removed all restrictions on the movements of the Guru and gave orders that Guru Gobind Singh and his Sikhs should be harassed no more. Aurangzeb's conscience seemed to prick him for the cruelties inflicted on the Guru and his Sikhs. It is said that he took to his bed and soon thereafter he died.

After Aurangzeb's proclamation, the Guru came to Talwandi Sabo, now known as Damdama Saheb. The local chief called Dalla came to him and condoled with him on the martyrdom of his four sons. Dalla led a contingent of four hundred men and said again and again, that if he had known it, he would have placed his men at the Guru's disposal. 'Each one of them would have died fighting for you.' As he was talking in this vein, a Sikh came and presented a gun to the Guru. The Guru asked Dalla to go and get one of his men so that he could check his aim with the new weapon. Dalla was flabbergasted to hear it. But when the Guru insisted, he went over to his people and as he feared, not one of his men came forward to serve as the Guru's target. Dalla was greatly mortified. He returned to the Guru, his head hanging in shame.

The moment the Guru saw him, he asked one of his

attendants to go and tell the two young Sikhs tying their turbans at a little distance, that the Guru wanted one of them to serve as his target to test the new gun that he had been presented with. As the young Sikhs heard it, they came running to the Guru. Both of them vied with each other for the honour. They happened to be brothers. The elder brother said, he had a better claim to serve his father, the Guru, while the younger one said, he must have his share of the father's property.

Dalla was astonished to see this devotion. The Guru told him that it was *amrit* which made such heroes of men. It made sparrows challenge hawks.

It was at Damdama Saheb that the Guru's consort joined him after the battle. It is said that when she arrived, the Guru was in congregation.

'Where are my children, my four darling sons?' the bereaved mother cried in agony.

'Here are thousands of them all your children,' the Guru told her, pointing to the congregation.

It was again at Damdama Saheb that Guru Gobind Singh found time to redictate the *Holy Granth* incorporating in it Guru Tegh Bahadur's hymns.

After Aurangzeb's death, there was a scramble for succession to the Mughal throne as usual. Aurangzeb's eldest son Bahadur Shah was in Peshawar, therefore, his younger brother Azam proclaimed himself King. Bahadur Shah sought the Guru's assistance. Since he was the rightful successor, the Guru was keen to ensure that like his father, Bahadur Shah was not misled. He placed a detachment at his disposal. Bahadur Shah was victorious and invited the Guru for his coronation when he presented him a robe of honour and several precious gifts.

They became such good friends that Bahadur Shah persuaded the Guru to accompany him to the South on his tour. It was indeed the victory of truth over falsehood, vindication of good-neighbourliness and communal amity against bigotry and narrow parochialism.

V

THE WORD BECAME THE GURU

The compilation and the consecration of the Holy Granth is a fascinating story of catholicity of outlook, brotherhood of man and communal amity.

Says Guru Nanak :

What I am communicated to by my Master
I transmit unto you.

The Guru was only the medium. And the Holy Spirit is said to travel from Guru Nanak through the rest of the nine Sikh Gurus succeeding him, until Guru Gobind Singh, the 'tenth Guru Nanak', who said :

As ordained by the Lord Eternal
A new way of life is evolved
All the Sikhs are asked
To accept the Holy Granth as the Guru
Guru Granth should be accepted
As the living Guru
Those who wish to meet God
Will find Him in the Word.

Thus the Word became the Guru. The stewardship of the Sikh Panth—the Sikh way of life—was entrusted to the Holy Granth. Guru Gobind Singh declared unequivocally that those who wished to seek God would find him in the Scripture.

With the passing away of Guru Gobind Singh, the tradition of the living Guru came to an end. The *Holy*

Granth was consecrated as the Guru. Those who looked for His blessings found them in the Book.

The Sikhs came to give the same esteem, the same veneration to the *Holy Granth* as to the living Guru. They prostrate before it the first thing every morning, make offerings of all sorts and seek guidance from the Scripture by reading, reciting and singing hymns.

And the text does not belong to the Sikh Gurus alone. The *Holy Granth* has, aside from the hymns of the Sikh Gurus, compositions of 36 men of God belonging to the various castes and creeds, religions and avocations. Among them are Jaidev of Bengal, Gurdas of Awadh, Namdev, Trilochan and Parmanand of Maharashtra, Beni, Ramanand, Pipa, Sain, Kabir, Ravidas, and Bhikan of Uttar Pradesh, Dhanna of Rajasthan and Farid of Multan in the Punjab. Not only this, some of them belonged to the so-called lowest of the low castes. Kabir was a weaver, Sadhna a butcher, Namdev a tailor, Sain a barber and Ravidas a tanner. The compiler of the *Holy Granth* did not allow communal or religious distinctions to come in his way. Dhanna was a Jat, while Pipa was a king. Farid was a Muslim divine and Bhikka a learned scholar of Islam, while Jaidev was a Hindu mystic and poet.

Thus when a Sikh bows before and seeks guidance from the *Holy Granth*, he offers his devotion as much to Farid, the renowned Muslim saint, and Jaidev, a Hindu bhakta of Krishna, as to Guru Nanak or Guru Arjan, the compiler of the *Granth*. It is a commonwealth of the men of God.

Be that as it may, it is said that some of the Guru's detractors made a complaint to the Mughal Emperor Akbar that the work compiled by Guru Arjan Dev included compositions that maligned Islam and Hinduism. Akbar happened to be touring the Punjab in those days. He summoned the Guru along with the manuscript of the Holy Granth. While the Guru did not consider it necessary to go personally, he sent two of his trusted lieutenants with

the compilation. It is said the King had a hymn read out to him at random. It was a composition of Guru Arjan himself:

From clay and light God created the world;
The sky, the earth, trees and water are made by Him.

One must restrain oneself,
Hell is the punishment of the defaulter;
The miracle man, the riches, brothers, courtiers, kingdom and palaces;
None will come to your rescue at the hour of departure.

The King heard the hymn and was deeply impressed. However, the detractors contended that it was on purpose that the Emperor was read a piece that was not objectionable. At this the King himself pointed out a hymn and had it read out to him. This too was found least offensive to anyone. At this the wicked contended that since none of them knew the Gurmukhi script, the Guru's agent read the hymns from memory rather than the text indicated. Akbar now had Sahib Dyal, a local citizen, sent for to read out a piece pointed out by the King to him. The hymn read out was :

You don't see God who dwells in your heart,
And you carry about an idol on your neck.
A non-believer, you wander about churning water,
And you die harassed in delusion.
The idol you call God will drown with you.

The Emperor heard it and was greatly moved. He said, it was a work worthy of reverence. He made his offering of 31 gold mohurs to the *Holy Granth* and complimented Guru Arjan on the compilation and promised to visit Amritsar personally in the near future to pay his homage to the Guru. The Emperor remembered to keep his promise.

The compilation of the *Holy Granth* was led to by not a very happy family wrangle. Guru Angad who followed Guru Nanak was not his son. He was one of the disciples, who was considered the fittest for the honour. Similarly Guru Amar Das, the third Guru, was also a devotee of Guru Angad and no blood relative as such. Accordingly, when the time came to name his successor, Guru Amar Das decided in favour of Guru Ram Das in preference to his two sons, Mohan and Mohri.

While Guru Arjan, the fifth Sikh Guru, was a son of Guru Ram Das, he was not the eldest son, who expected to succeed his father. This put him off and he started maligning Guru Arjan and styled himself as a Guru. It was he who had complained to the Emperor against the Holy Granth. It was also learnt that Prithi Chand had started composing his own verses and passing them on to the Sikhs as scripture. When Guru Arjan came to know of it, he decided to compile the text of the compositions of Guru Nanak and his successors in an authentic volume to insulate them against spurious interpolations.

Once the decision was taken, Guru Arjan went about this ambitious project in a planned manner. As a first step, he sent scribes to the various places visited by Guru Nanak and his successors to contact those whom the Gurus had met and obtain from them the authentic versions of the hymns. A Sikh was deputed even to Sri Lanka. When it was reported that Mohan, the eldest son of Guru Amar Das, would not part with the hymns in his custody, Guru Arjan called on him personally at Goindwal and persuaded him to co-operate in the noble undertaking. On the way back Guru Arjan also visited Datu, Guru Angad's son, and collected whatever manuscripts were available with him.

In view of the importance of the task, Guru Arjan had a special cell set up in a quiet corner of Ramsar, one of the holy tanks in Amritsar. Bhai Gurdas, the eminent Sikh litterateur, was entrusted with the task of preparing the master-copy, Guru Arjan dictating the text himself. When

the *Holy Granth* was ready, it was installed with due ceremony at the Harimandir and Bhai Buddha, the oldest living disciple of Guru Nanak, appointed the first custodian. As a token of appreciation, Guru Arjan offered to include the compositions of Bhai Gurdas in the Holy Granth, but because of his modesty of a scholar, he denied himself the great honour.

The *Holy Granth* was redictated by Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and last living Sikh Guru, towards the close of his life when he had Guru Tegh Bahadur's compositions also incorporated in the body of the text. Again Guru Gobind Singh's greatness as a poet and his modesty did not allow him to include his own verse in it.

Guru Gobind Singh has a massive volume of compositions to his credit. Maybe the consideration that weighed against the inclusion of his own verse was that the compilation as done by Guru Arjan would get too unwieldy.

The hymns compiled in the *Holy Granth* have been arranged in various Ragas according to Hindustani music. The hymns under every musical measure are led by Guru Nanak and other Sikh Gurus in chronological order, the compositions of the bhaktas following them. There are approximately 6,000 hymns in the *Holy Granth* in 31 Ragas.

It is said Kahna, Chhajju, Pilu and a few other contemporary poets approached Guru Arjan and offered their verses for inclusion in the *Holy Granth*. The Guru duly considered their compositions but regretted his inability to include them in the volume for one reason or another.

Some of the bards who subscribed to the Sikh faith and composed several panegyrics in praise of the Sikh Gurus requested the incorporation of their compositions. A few of these were included in the *Holy Granth*.

The scripting of the text was completed in 1604, Guru Arjan providing the epilogue :

Three things are there in the vessel
Truth, contentment and learning.

The ambrosial Name of God is added to it,
The Name that is everybody's sustenance.
He who eats and enjoys it
Shall be saved.
One must not abandon this gift,
It should ever remain dear to one's heart.
The dark ocean of the world
Can be crossed by clinging to His feet,
Nanak, it is He who is everywhere. (Mundawani)

This was followed by an apologia in utmost modesty :

I can't measure Your grace
You've made me worthy of You.
I am full of blemishes;
I have no virtue
You have been compassionate.
Compassionate You have been and kind.
Thus I met the true Guru.
Says Nanak, I live on the Name alone,
It pleases my heart and soul. (Mundawani)

The *Rag Mala* following this, however, does not tally with the Ragas in the *Holy Granth* and its inclusion has been a subject of controversy for long.

The text in the *Holy Granth* had utmost sanctity accorded to it since its compilation. No change of even a syllable was permitted. For a long time, the Sikhs would not permit the words in the text to be written or printed separately; they continued to be copied as a continuous text following the original done by Bhai Gurdas.

It is said, once Aurangazeb took exception to a particular verse in the *Holy Granth*. Ram Rai, the son of Guru Har Rai, the seventh Sikh Guru, who was staying with Aurangzeb as his guest, altered the original slightly to please the King. When it was reported to the Guru, he was mortified and sent word to his son never to show

his face to him again.

Once Guru Har Rai was resting. A Sikh entered his room reciting hymns from the *Holy Granth*. The moment the Guru heard him, he rose and sat upright in reverence to the Holy Word.

The Holy Granth is the most ambitious compilation of devotional verse. It is also most representative of its times. It has a grand design and a highly scientific manner of presentation. The pattern adopted by Guru Arjan was such as permitted incorporation of later compositions without interfering with the text of the works already compiled. Guru Gobind Singh didn't have to disturb the arrangement while adding Guru Tegh Bahadur's compositions to the compilation.

It opens with the mool mantra, the basic postulate:

There is but one God
His Name is Truth
He is the Creator
He fears none nor does he hate anyone
He is in the image of the Eternal
He is beyond birth and death
He is self-existent
He can be attained by the Guru's grace.

The thirty-one Ragas included in the *Holy Granth* are: Sri Rag, Majh, Gauri, Asa, Gujri, Dev Gandhari, Bihagda Wadhans, Sorath, Dhanasri, Jaitsri, Todi, Bairadi, Tilang, Suhi, Bilawal, Gaud, Ramkali, Nat Narayan, Mali Gauda, Maru, Tukhari, Kidara, Bhairav, Basant, Sarang, Malhar, Kanada, Kalyan, Prabhati and Jaijaivanti.

Following the compositions figuring under the various Ragas, there are a number of other hymns like Sanskrit slokas, the Gatha and the Swaiyyas.

The order of hymns usually followed under each Raga is as follows: Shabad, Ashtapadis, Chhand, Var and hymns contributed by the bhaktas. In order to guard against the risk of interpolations, every Shabad and every verse in the

Holy Granth is numbered and recorded. The numbering also helps in locating the hymns conveniently.

As a literary work, the *Holy Granth* has some remarkable pieces of poetic excellence in both form and content. The language varies from Sanskrit and Persian to the Punjabi as spoken in those times in the form of various dialects. The poetic forms are as varied as they are original. They invariably reflect the mood of the text and succeed eminently in communicating it to the reader. The Gurus and the bhaktas take ample liberties with the form and do not seem to observe the rigidities of the traditional poetic moulds. In order that their compositions should be popular, the Gurus preferred the measures and tunes of the folk ballads and folk-songs. This must have helped the Sikhs to sing the hymns in their proper tunes. It is a great pity that since Hindustani music has an oral tradition, most of the tunes, prescribed by the respective authors, are lost with time.

The poetry of the *Holy Granth* is a mine of philosophic thought. It is highly revealing and reflects a way of life which is as simple as it is ennobling. Every word of it inspires and elevates. It has an equal appeal for the erudite scholar as for the least literate reader. It evokes veneration as much from the Sikhs as from the non-Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims alike.

It must, however, be understood that paper and the printed word are not the Guru. They are only the vehicle. The Guru is what is contained in it, what one imbibes by reading the text, the revelation, the vision, the ecstasy. However, the fact remains that while the container that holds the nectar may not be nectar itself, it is no common place container.

VI

MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH'S SECULARISM

It is difficult to define secularism. Secularism does not pertain to wordly things or things that are not regarded as religious, spiritual or sacred. It is marrying reason to faith. Secularism is religious neutralism on the part of the State that decides issues on merit, irrespective of considerations of caste, creed or colour.

According to this concept of the term, Maharaja Ranjit Singh's regime was truly secular. Built on the ruins of the Mughal Empire, his kingdom extended from Tibet to Sind and from Kabul to the Sutlej. It is said, 80 per cent of the population of the territory he ruled over was Muslim, 10 per cent Hindu and the remaining 10 per cent were his co-religionists.

He was a devout Sikh. He said his daily prayers after an early morning bath. Paid his homage to the Holy Granth. Such was his faith in the Sikh scriptures that he never launched any expedition or project or even a trivial matter without seeking guidance from the Book. It is said that he carried a copy of the Holy Granth even to the battlefield with due veneration on an exclusive elephant. Once he was found guilty of a lapse as a Gursikh. He presented himself at Akal Takht, the highest Sikh religious seat, and offered himself for punishment to atone for it. The Maharaja offered himself to receive lashes on his bare back served by Akali Phula Singh.

He never discriminated against any other faith. Once he told his Foreign Minister Fakir Azizuddin, 'God intended my looking upon all the religions with one eye, that is

why I was deprived of the other eye.'

Born in November 1780 at his maternal parents' house, he was given the name of Budh Singh—the man of learning. However, when the news was communicated to his father, Maha Singh Sakarchakya, who at the time was engaged in a skirmish with a neighbouring chief, he changed his son's name to Ranjit Singh—the man of destiny. Ranjit Singh won many a battle but remained unlettered all his life.

It was not until he was seventeen that he became the real master of his estate. He consolidated his position by matrimonial alliances with Kanhyas by marrying Mahtab Kaur, the daughter of Sada Kaur (whose husband had been killed by Ranjit Singh's father) and Raj Kaur, a sister of Nakkai Sardar. For obvious reasons, it was a strange love-hate relation that he developed with Sada Kaur, his mother-in-law. It helped and hindered his adventures in the years to come. It is amazing that, even at that early age, Ranjit Singh made important moves towards consolidating the Sikh Sardars in the Punjab who were broken up into twelve principalities called *misals*.

A welcome opportunity came his way when Shah Zaman cast his 'owl-like shadow over the Punjab'. The Sikh fraternity met at Akal Takht, Ranjit Singh leading them. It was called *Sarbat Khalsa*. The decision taken at the holy spot at Amritsar had religious sanction. A number of Sardars were in favour of fleeing to the hills as they did earlier, but Ranjit Singh remained adamant. It was eventually decided to give fight to the intruder under Ranjit Singh's command. Under his inspiring leadership, the Sikhs not only drove Shah Zaman back, but a time came when Ranjit Singh climbed the Musumm Burj in Lahore Fort where the invader was holding court and shouted, 'O you progeny of Abdali, come out and measure your sword with the progeny of Charhat Singh.' It is said that the Afghan soldiers got mighty afraid of the Sikhs. They would not stir out of their barracks at night. In this

encounter the Punjabi Muslims, who believed that their co-religionists would not harm them, were the worst sufferers. Ranjit Singh chased Shah Zaman up to the banks of the river Indus, inflicting grievous losses on the enemy. Thus the belief that grass never grows where the Afghan horses tread was belied for good.

After the retreat of the Afghans, Lahore was occupied by three Sardars of whom Chet singh was the most impetuous. They misruled the town indulging in drinking and debauchery. The people got sick of them and Muslims and non-Muslims alike sent word to Ranjit Singh to come and take over the town. When Ranjit Singh heard it, he sent his trusted lieutenant, Abdul Rehman, to verify the truth of it. After he was reassured, Ranjit Singh marched at the head of 25,000 troops and occupied Lahore, the biggest and most prestigious town of the Punjab, without any bloodshed. After taking over the town, the first thing Ranjit Singh did was to go and pay homage to the *Badshahi Masjid*—the Royal Mosque.

Ranjit Singh paid immediate attention to the administration of the town and welfare of the people. None could practise highhandedness or oppression. Even if the Maharaja himself issued an unfair order, it could be brought to his notice for review. The judges were asked to administer justice in accordance with the Shastras and the Quran. Nizamuddin was appointed Chief Kazi. He had Mohammed Shahpuri and Saidullah as his muftis. There was a chain of Yunani dispensaries in the town under Hakim Nuruddin, who was the Chief Medical Officer. Imam Baksh was appointed Kotwal of Lahore.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh had several high positions in his army entrusted to Hindus and Muslims. There were more than forty high-ranking Muslim officers in his forces. At least two of them were generals. After Ranjit Singh had captured a chain of small states around Lahore, he sent a force of 20,000 men led my Misr Diwan Chand, a Hindu general, to attack Multan. He was to be assisted by Ilahi

Bakhsh, a Muslim general of repute. It was a keenly fought battle. Nawab Muzaffar Khan of Multan fought to the last. But ultimately victory fell into the hands of the Maharaja's forces. This conquest also helped subdue a number of Muslim states like Bahawalpur, Dera Ghazi Khan, Dera Ismail Khan and Mankera. Immediately after the victory of Multan, the Maharaja went to the mausoleum of Shah Abdul Mali built by Mian Ghausa, one of Ranjit Singh's commanders, who was killed in the fighting, to pay homage at the shrine.

Then followed a series of important conquests that included Jammu, Srinagar, Peshawar and Kabul. It was a practice with the Maharaja to endow all the dispossessed chiefs with *jagirs* and as far as possible made permanent friendships with them. He was particularly considerate towards the Muslim rulers.

The Maharaja handled the English imperialists with great tact and as long as he lived, he kept them at arm's length. He employed foreigners to modernise his army and administration. It is said, there were thirty-seven foreigners in his service. They included three Englishmen, twelve Frenchmen, four Italians, four Germans, two Spaniards, one Russian, one Scot, seven Anglo-Indians and three Americans. All of them were employed on well-defined terms.

Ranjit Singh never styled himself a monarch as such. For a long time he would not sit on a formal throne. He considered himself a leader of his people, a general voted by his community to fight for them. Says Vincent Smith, 'The Punjab state was neither a traditional Indian territorial state and monarchy, nor merely a dictatorship of one community over another. There was an element of partnership with other communities. Ranjit did not claim the despotic sway of a traditional monarch over his own Sikhs. He was in some sense its elected chief and, like Augustus Caesar, he was careful never to push his pretensions too far. To the end though taking the title of Maha-

raja, he claimed to be no more than a general of the Khalsa.'

When Maharaja Ranjit Singh came to power, it was the practice of the Sikh fraternity to get together at Akal Takht in Amritsar every time they had a major problem facing the community. It was called *Sarbat Khalsa*. They would debate the issue and the decision would be taken by consensus. It was binding on everyone. It had religious sanction behind it. The last such Gurmatta passed by the brotherhood was in 1809 when Holkar sought refuge in the Punjab. He was being chased by Lord Lake of the East India Company. The astute ruler in Ranjit Singh found it convenient to replace *Sarbat Khalsa* by a council called 'The Pillars of Kingdom'. In this way he formally effected a divorce between the spiritual and temporal affairs'. Amongst the Pillars of Kingdom were Dhian Singh Dogra, a Hindu who was his Home Minister, and Fakir Azizud-din, a Muslim, who was his Foreign Minister. This was indeed a brave departure from a practice that everyone among the Sikh *misals* had come to respect.

After he assumed the title of Maharaja in a darbar in 1801, Ranjit Singh struck his own coins in a mint in Lahore. One of the coins had the following Persian couplet engraved on it:

Deg-o-teg-o-fateh-o-nusrat bedarang
Yaft az Nanak Guru Gobind Singh.

The words were both in Persian and Gurmukhi scripts. It is said, the Maharaja also issued coins called *Moranshahi Sikka* in honour of Moran, a Muslim courtesan, whom he had taken as a queen. The Sikhs never excused him for it. He was heavily fined but the coin remained in currency. Some people believe that Moranshahi Sikka was Maharaja Ranjit Singh's tribute to the womanhood of the Punjab since rather than the image of Moran, his most favourite queen, he had *Arsi*—thumb-mirror—carved on one side of the coin. The thumb-mirror was popular with society

women of Punjab in those days.

Though every inch a Punjabi who would prostrate before the Holy Granth written in Gurmukhi script every morning, Maharaja Ranjit Singh did not have Punjabi as the state language. Persian continued to be the language of the court. He encouraged his princes to learn even foreign languages like English. He had some foreign works translated into Punjabi and is said to have granted a *jagir* to Shah Mohammed, a Punjabi poet of his time, who wrote an account of his expeditions with considerable devotion and skill. Along with the propagation of Punjabi, he also gave endowments to Persian institutions like Mian Wada at Lahore.

There are ever so many stories that show that Maharaja Ranjit Singh gave equal respect to all religions. This story is told by Fakir Syed Waheeduddin, a progeny of Fakir Azizuddin, Foreign Minister of Maharaja Ranjit Singh:

> 'On one occasion the Maharaja and the Fakir were out walking on the outskirts of Lahore, when they met a bullock-cart carrying what looked like a huge book. The Maharaja stopped the bullock-cart and asked the driver what he was carrying. "Maharaj," replied the driver, "I am a calligraphist and this book is a manuscript of the Holy Quran which is my life-time's work. I am on my way to Hyderabad to sell it to the Muslim King of that country. I hear he is a very pious and generous man." The Maharaja turned to Fakir Azizuddin and said, "This man seems to think that there is nobody this side of Hyderabad who is pious and generous enough to pay him a good price." Then he asked the calligraphist, "How much are you expecting, my good man?" The calligraphist named what would be a huge sum for a manuscript of the kind even today—ten thousand rupees. Before the Minister could intervene, the deal had been closed. "Fakirji," commanded the Maharaja, "please see to it that the man is paid ten thousand rupees from the state treasury."

Soon after the manuscript had been acquired, the Maharaja asked Azizuddin to read out to him a passage from it. Azizuddin read out Sura Yusuf (Chapter on Joseph) and then translated it for the Maharaja's benefit. "But Fakirji," remarked Ranjit Singh, "the Granth Sahib says the same kind of thing. What is the difference?" "None, Your Highness," replied the Fakir, "the goal is the same, only paths are different." The Maharaja rewarded Azizuddin for this apt remark by making a gift of the manuscript to him.'

It is said, once Sardar Hukam Singh Chimni, a noted general and a favourite of the Maharaja, had one Said Khan assassinated due to some personal enmity. When the Maharaja came to know of it, he was wild. He sacked the Sardar from service and fined him one hundred and twenty-five thousand rupees. The amount was paid to the bereaved family. There being no capital punishment in Maharaja Ranjit Singh's *raj*, it could have been worse. Capital punishment was not awarded even when an attempt was made on the Maharaja's person.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh ensured that the administration of justice was properly organised. There were proper courts presided over by competent judicial officers. There were special courts for Muslims who wished to be administered by *shariat* laws. The Maharaja revived the offices of *kazi* and *mufti* prevalent during the Mughal period. He organised the revenue system of the state by appointing Bhawani Das, a high official, as chief of the Finance Department. Revenue collection of the Punjab was no more the responsibility of an Amritsar banker. According to one estimate, Maharaja Ranjit Singh's army, including the irregulars, at the time of his death totalled 1,23,800 (92,000 infantry and 31,800 cavalry and artillery), which is almost equal in size to the entire Indian army's strength on the eve of World War II in 1939. There were 384 heavy guns and 400 light guns with the artillery.

As regards public offices, it was purely merit that weighed with the Maharaja. The only other consideration was his anxiety to give due representation to the various communities. The key posts were manned by talent from various communities and parts of the world not excluding foreigners. In his book entitled *The Real Ranjit Singh* published after partition in Pakistan, Fakir Syed Waheeduddin states: 'As regards Muslims in particular, the author's family archives contain lists of Muslim officers in the higher and middle echelons. Among the top-ranking Muslim officers, there were two ministers, one governor, and several district officers. There were forty-one high-ranking Muslim officers in the army, two of them generals, several of them colonels and the rest holding other important ranks. There were ninety-two Muslims who were senior officers in the police, the judiciary and the legal department and the supply and stores departments.' The Maharaja had a galaxy of talent around him. Amongst the Sikhs were Sham singh Attariwala, Hari Singh Nalwa and Sher Singh. The Muslims were represented by the three Fakir brothers—Azizuddin, Nuruddin and Immamuddin—General Ghaus Khan and Ilahi Bakhsh. Amongst the Hindus were Dhian Singh, Gulab Singh, Khushal Singh, Ram Singh and Misr Diwan Chand.

The main Sikh temple at Amritsar called Harimandir Saheb was destroyed by Ahmed Shah Abdali in 1761. Maharaja Ranjit Singh had the temple rebuilt. Its periphery was laid with marble stones especially acquired from Rajasthan and its dome was gilded later when the Maharaja annexed Kashmir to his territory. It has since come to be called the Golden Temple. He had also a number of mosques erected from the state funds. A mosque was built in Lahore and dedicated to Moran, the courtesan-queen of the Maharaja. Several important mosques were made endowments in the form of *jagirs* for their proper maintenance. Similar endowments were made to Hindu temples.

The Maharaja visited Hindu and Muslim places of

worship as devotedly as he visited the Sikh holy shrines. During his royal tours he visited varied places of pilgrimage. These included Punja Sahib, the famous Hindu temples at Kangra and Jammu, the well of Puran Bhagat, the mausoleum of Datta Ganj Baksh and the shrine of Mian Mir.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh's secularism was of the eighteenth-century type. It was conceived in a spirit of compromise and enlightened self-interest. It was in this spirit that the people of Lahore including Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs invited him to occupy the town and relieve them from the tyranny of the ruling triumvirate. It was in this very spirit that he had complete faith in the three Fakir brothers whose successors have remained ardent admirers of the Maharaja until today. That Maharaja Ranjit Singh had endeared himself to his subjects of all castes and creeds was evident from the way prayers were offered in gurdwaras, mosques and temples when he was taken seriously ill before he passed away on Thursday, 27 June 1839.

VII

SIKHS IN THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE

The role of the Sikhs in India's struggle for freedom remains not fully appreciated. They fought against British rule as few others did. The number of Sikhs dead in India's fight for freedom proportionately far outnumbers any other section of Indian society. There was hardly an agitation in which they did not participate, whether it was the Swadeshi Movement or the Khilafat, Partition of Bengal or Quit India. They offered themselves for arrest in hundreds and thousands, underwent severest persecution and suffered untold privation.

The Sikhs were the last to surrender to the British in the sub-continent and they were the first to raise arms against them. Their so-called communal agitations helped make British rule unsteady and contributed in no inconsiderable measure to the freedom movement. For was it not Mahatma Gandhi himself who greeted the Sikhs telegraphically—'The first decisive battle of Independence won. Congratulations'—when the Sikhs succeeded in their agitation for the control of Sikh gurudwaras and places of pilgrimage?

The Jallianwala Bagh massacre took place next to the Golden Temple, with the number of killed the largest among the Sikhs. Where in the modern world is an instance of a people lying on the rails with their wives and children and getting dismembered just to stop a train of freedom fighters who had to be fed and provided fresh water since they were said to be hungry? Not many can claim the valour with which sardar Bhagat Singh offered

himself at the altar of India's freedom. It is said, he kissed the noose before he was hanged.

That the agitations launched by the Sikhs for communal ends were a training ground, as it were, for the bigger fight for the country's freedom is made evident from the fact that all the front-rank Sikh political leaders in the Indian National Congress, before and after Independence, had been Akali activists whether it is Kharak Singh or Mangal Singh, Gurmukh Singh 'Musafir' or Pratap Singh Kairon, Swaran Singh or Hukam Singh, Baldev Singh or Buta Singh, Giani Zail Singh or Gurdial Singh Dhillon. Not only this, Sardul Singh 'Caveeshar', who finally succeeded Subhash Chandra Bose as the Chief of the Forward Block, and Sohan Singh 'Josh', the veteran communist leader, were also active Akali workers at one time.

Good or bad, it has never been possible for the Sikhs to separate politics from religion. Dictated by the exigencies of statecraft, Maharaja Ranjit Singh tried it when he came into his own as the first Sikh ruler. Baldev Singh, Swaran Singh and Hukam Singh, the nominees of Master Tara Singh, Chief of the Akali Party, were alienated one after another from their mentor on their joining the Congress Government at the Centre. Such are the imperatives of Indian politics. Whatever their differences with the Union Government, the Sikhs of the Punjab whether a farmer or a soldier, a labourer or a trader, acquitted themselves splendidly in the three wars fought with Pakistan after India became independent. They continue to offer themselves for recruitment in the Indian forces far beyond their numerical proportion.

They inherited a badly neglected, arid part of the Punjab at the time of Partition. They have turned it into a granary of the country. Claiming highest per-capita income, the Sikhs have made no mean contribution to the small-scale industry as well. With a rare spirit of enterprise and hard work, they have made a success of whatever field they have entered. Spread all over the length and

breadth of India, nay, every part of the world, the Punjab remains their homeland. And this is how it should be.

The Sikhs were always in the mainstream of the national life. They remain so enjoying highest offices in the land and availing themselves of unlimited opportunities offered by a big country like India. They are involved in India's fight for social justice today as vigorously as they had plunged themselves once into the struggle for freedom.

The story of the Sikhs' fight for freedom goes back to the nineteenth century when in 1863 a splinter sect of the community called Kukas organised themselves under Ram Singh (1816-1885). They were a para-military sect given training in the use of weapons. They propagated strict Swadeshi. Wore home-spun Khadi (cotton). Led utterly austere lives. Boycotted British goods. They had nothing to do with British educational institutions or even their courts. They had their own postal arrangements to carry messages for them. Inevitably they clashed with the government and a large number of them were tied to the barrels of guns and blown off or cut to pieces. Their leader, Ram Singh, with eleven of his close followers, was banished to Burma. He is said to have died in exile in 1885 pining for the motherland.

The next landmark in the Sikh struggle for freedom was the agitation launched against the Punjab Colonisation Act, 1907, under which the Government sought to enhance land revenue and water charges in the canal irrigated areas. There was widespread agrarian unrest with bloodshed in all important towns like Lahore and Rawalpindi. It was during this agitation that one Banke Dyal wrote the famous song—*Pagdi sambhal jatta, pagdi sambhal oye* (Mind your turban, O tiller of the land, mind your turban). It became a popular patriotic song with the freedom fighters and continues to be sung even today. Sardar Ajit Singh and Lala Lajpat Rai were prominent among the leaders of the movement. They were both

expelled from the country and imprisoned in Mandalay in Burma. After their release Ajit Singh went to Canada and joined the Ghadar Party of which he became an outstanding leader in due course.

The Ghadar Party was started by Sohan Singh Bhakna under the inspiration of Lala Hardyal. They pledged to end British rule in India through an armed revolution and set up a Republic of India guaranteeing liberty and equality to all its citizens. They set up their headquarters in San Francisco. They had their own weekly journal called Ghadar. With a view to retaining the secular character of their organisation, they made it a point not to discuss religion in their meetings; it was considered strictly a personal affair. They would also not observe any restrictions in the matter of diet. Soon they were to be joined by Kartar Singh 'Sarabha', Dr Mathura singh and Jawand Singh who were later hanged in India. The Party established its branches in a number of towns in America and Canada and also in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Philippines, Thailand and Panama. They also gave a select band of its members training in arms.

The activities of the Ghadar Party received a great fillip by what has come to be known as the *Kamagata Maru* episode. It inspired the Ghadarites and steeled their hearts against the ferringhi. They were determined to throw away the foreign yoke and prepared themselves to make any sacrifice for this cause.

The *Kamagata Maru* was the name of a Japanese ship engaged by Baba Gurdit Singh for transporting Indian emigrants to Canada. There being widespread unemployment at home, more and more enterprising Punjabis sought to go abroad, Canada being a member of the Commonwealth, Indians were entitled to have free access to the country. However, at the instance of the British Government, Canada passed an act preventing entry of the Asians. This was primarily directed against the Indians since thev continued to allow Chinese and Japanese to

immigrate in large numbers. The Sikhs would not have it. Accordingly, the *Kamagata Maru* with 376 passengers on board arrived at Vancouver on 22 May 1914. They were not permitted to land on Canadian soil. The ship was stranded in the high seas. The passengers had no medicines. They even fell short of water. But the Canadian authorities would not relent. There was a skirmish with the local police when it is alleged, fire was exchanged. The Government of Canada was not willing even to allow them provisions for their return journey. This enraged the Indians in Vancouver who threatened to set fire to the entire city. At this the Government appeared to see reason and the ship was allowed provisions for the return journey. The *Kamagata Maru* sailed back after two months. The returning passengers were provided arms en route at Yokohama and the leadership of Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna and Baba Gurdit Singh turned each one of the passengers into a hard core revolutionary.

World War I having broken out in the meanwhile, the *Kamagata Maru* had a hostile reception when it touched Calcutta. There was a train waiting to carry the passengers to the Punjab. This was not acceptable to the self-respecting Punjabis, who wished to stay back at least in Calcutta and earn something, so that they didn't have to go back home empty-handed. There was a confrontation in which eighteen passengers were slaughtered. However, twenty-eight of them including Baba Gurdit Singh managed to escape. Baba Gurdit Singh remained underground for seven years until he surrendered himself to the police at Nankana Saheb, the birth-place of Guru Nanak.

The Ghadar Party continued to inject revolutionaries into Indian politics. It is said, out of 8000 returnees during 1914-18, the Government of India interned 5000 and restricted the movements of another 2500. The Party had its sympathisers in the defence forces though due to lack of discipline and leadership it could not take any precipitate action. Nevertheless, the Government was on their track.

The suspects were arrested. Among the 194 men taken into custody 180 were Punjabis. Most of them were Sikhs. They were charged with treason. As many as twelve were hanged. Some of them were imprisoned for life. Others were transported. And the rest were given various terms of imprisonment.

Considering that the Indian National Congress session at Madras in 1914 had its main hall decorated with the portrait of the British King and the Governor of the province was invited to grace the occasion with his presence, it was no mean achievement of the Ghadar Party to do all that it did. Its most significant contribution is that it made the Britishers realise that they could no longer take India for granted. They must negotiate with the Indian people and hand over power to them, maybe gradually.

The Great October Revolution of 1917 which overthrew the Czarist regime and brought the people to power in the USSR also had its salutary effect on the arrogant White rulers on whose empire, it was said, the sun never set.

The War was over but the Punjab was in ferment. the forces being demobilised had 80,000 Sikh soldiers. Gandhi had in the meanwhile assumed charge of the national leadership. A great believer in the good faith of the White man, he was dismayed to find that the British Government had no desire to part with power. He, therefore, gave a call for satyagraha.

On 13 April, 1919, the holy Baisakhi day, consecrated by Guru Gobind Singh with the baptism of the Sikhs, large crowds assembled at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar. They included men, women and children. Brigadier General Edward Harry Dyer who had arrived in the town two days earlier with his force came to the scene, blocked the only exit and started firing on the unarmed innocent people with machine-guns 'till his ammunition was exhausted'. The record says that 309 people were shot dead on the spot and many times that number were wounded.

The Sikhs were again largest in number to suffer casualties.

The people of the Punjab went wild with anger. They set post offices and other government buildings on fire, massacred the White men who came their way, removed fish plates from the railway lines, cut telephone and telegraph wires. The entire Punjab was aflame. The government declared martial law and retaliatory measures were in evidence all over the province.

The Punjab became the vortex of the political struggle. The Nobel Laureate, Rabindranath Tagore, relinquished his knighthood as a protest against the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. The Indian National Congress held its annual session at Amritsar in December the same year. It was attended among others by Mahatma Gandhi, Motilal Nehru, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Jawaharlal Nehru, C F Andrews, C R Das, Dr M A Ansari, the Ali Brothers and Hakim Ajmal Khan. Among the eminent Punjabi leaders who participated in it were Baba Kharak Singh, Lala Lajpat Rai and Sardar Sardul Singh 'Caveeshar'.

The Sikhs now came to look upon Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru as their national leaders and started seeking inspiration from them. They were in the vanguard of the political movement. The Sikh League held a meeting in Lahore presided over by Sardar Kharak Singh in 1920. It was attended by Mahatma Gandhi.

It was about this time that the Sikhs launched what came to be known as the Akali Movement. Essentially aimed at taking charge of the Sikh shrines from the mahants—the hereditary custodians—and bringing about reforms in the rituals and elaborate ceremonials, the movement went a long way in politicising the Sikh masses and inculcating in them passion for independence.

The Gurudwara Reform Movement was a gruelling struggle. The vested interests would not like to part with the charge of the Sikh shrines, some of which had considerable landed property attached to them, apart from the

income from the offerings which was no less substantial. The Sikhs had to launch *morcha* (agitation) after *morcha*. At times the fight was headlong with the government, while at others the government appeared to protect the hereditary custodians who were its proteges. In Delhi the government had demolished a wall of the historical Gurudwara Rakab Ganj where the Ninth Sikh Guru had been cremated. The Sikhs were wild. An agitation was launched. A *shahidi jatha* comprising Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus, who were prepared to be martyred, left for Delhi under Sardul Singh 'Caveeshar'. The Government came to its senses and restored the wall of the holy shrine.

After the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy, the hereditary custodians of the Golden Temple invited Sir Michael O'Dwyer and honoured him with a *saropa*. How could the community allow the charge of the Gurudwara to remain in the hands of such inveterate toadies? Accordingly another agitation was launched to take over the Golden Temple.

Mahant Narain Das of Nankana Saheb, the birth-place of Guru Nanak, was a debauch and a drunkard. He was pampered by the Britishers no less. A *jatha* of over 130 Sikhs who were visiting the Gurudwara were attacked with swords and spears by the goondas of the Mahant and massacred. Their dead bodies were sprinkled with kerosene and burnt on the premises. The leader of the *jatha* Sardar Lachhman Singh was tied to the trunk of a tree and lynched.

The tragic happening sent a wave of horror throughout the country. Mahatma Gandhi and the Ali Brothers visited Nankana Saheb. The Government was alarmed. The charge of the Gurudwara was promptly handed over to a committee of the Sikhs.

The Government, however, decided to appoint its own custodian for the Golden Temple. This was not acceptable to the Sikhs and the agitation continued. The agitators were sentenced to frightfully long terms of imprisonment.

But there was no sign of the agitation abating anywhere. The Sikhs continued to protest and court arrests in hundreds and thousands.

At last the Government was brought to its knees and the keys of the Golden Temple were handed over to the Sikhs by the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar at a huge congregation held in the town. This was described by Mahatma Gandhi as the first victory in a decisive battle for independence.

But what brought unique glory to the Sikhs was the *Gura Ka Bagh* agitation. A piece of land in Ajnala tehsil called *Guru Ka Bagh* (The Guru's Garden) which was no more than a barren tract with a wild growth of Kikar trees had been handed over to the Sikhs along with other shrines. However, Mahant Sunder Das changed his mind and would not allow the Sikhs to enter the premises. The Sikhs used to fell trees in the arid tract for fuel for the community kitchen. The Mahant sought police assistance and the Sikhs entering the so-called Bagh were arrested for trespass. The first arrest took place on 8 August 1922. This was followed by a chain of Sikh *jathas* visiting *Guru Ka Bagh* one after another and offering satyagraha. The *jathas* came from all over the Punjab. There was an endless stream of them. It was decided to be a non-violent agitation. The Sikhs would go unarmed, singing hymns, with hands folded and tried to enter the land which belonged to their Guru. The police who were tired of arresting them adopted new tactics under a British Superintendent of Police named S G N Beaty. They would beat the Sikhs mercilessly, pulling them by the hair, making indiscriminate lathi charges, breaking their bones and inflicting grievous wounds on them. With the name of God on their lips, the satyagrahis would fall down unconscious but they would neither defend themselves nor retaliate. Many died, a large number of them had to be hospitalised but there was no stopping the stream of *jathas*. Though propagated by Mahatma Gandhi, the Sikhs have non-violence in their

blood. Two of their Gurus—Guru Arjan and Guru Tegh Bahadur—had given their lives as non-violent crusaders. The way the Sikhs conducted this satyagraha, and the barbarities perpetrated on them, roused the anger of the entire nation. The Punjab was a flaming cauldron. Every district tried to outdo the other. A *jatha* came from far-off Dhani Pothoar with Giani Gurmukh Singh 'Musafir' (who became the Chief Minister of Punjab in Independent India) as one of the volunteers. A lot of literature came to be produced about the unprecedented persecution and valour of the non-violent satyagrahis.

It surprised Mahatma Gandhi, the apostle of non-violence, the most. He was amazed to find vindication of his technique of political warfare coming from the most unexpected quarters, the brave people of the Punjab. Several national leaders both Hindus and Muslims came to the Punjab to see with their own eyes the way the *satyagraha* was being conducted.

Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, a staunch Hindu who was at one time President of the Indian National Congress, witnessed the manner in which the disciplined soldiers of the Sikh community suffered barbarities for the cause dear to their heart and was moved to say—'I cannot resist asking every Hindu home to have at least one male child initiated into the fold of the Khalsa. What I see here before my eyes is nothing short of a miracle in our whole history.'

C F Andrews, a Christian missionary and an associate of Mahatma Gandhi, also visited the Punjab during the satyagraha. This is what he reported:

> 'There were four Akali Sikhs with black turbans facing a band of about a dozen policemen, including two English officers. Their hands were placed together in prayer. Then an Englishman without provocation lunged forward the head of his lathi, bound with brass, and struck the Sikh at the collarbone with great force. He fell to the ground, rolled over and slowly got up

once more to face the same punishment till he was laid prostrate by repeated blows. Others were knocked out more quickly. It was brutal in the extreme. I saw with my own eyes one of those policemen kick in the stomach a Sikh who stood helplessly before him. I wanted to cry and rush forward. But then I saw a police sepoy stamping with his foot an Akali Sikh hurled to the ground and lying prostrate...The brutality and the inhumanity of the whole scene was indescribably increased by the fact that the men who were hit were praying to God and had taken a vow (at the Golden Temple) to remain silent and peaceful in word and deed. I saw no act or look of defiance. It was a true martyrdom, a true act of faith. It reminded me of the shadow of the cross.'

There were ever so many similar *morchas*. *Guru Ka Bagh* was followed by what has come to be known as the *Jaito Morcha*. Jawaharlal Nehru also joined hands with the agitating Sikhs here and courted arrest along with a number of prominent national leaders. Nehru made the following observation on the occasion:

'I rejoice that I am being tried for a cause which the Sikhs have made their own. I was in jail when Guru Ka Bagh struggle was gallantly fought and won by the Sikhs. I marvelled at the courage and sacrifice of the Akalis and wished that I could be given an opportunity of showing my deep admiration of them by some form of service. That opportunity has now been given to me and I earnestly hope that I shall prove worthy of their high tradition and fine courage. Sat Sri Akal.'

25 September 1923 Jawaharlal Nehru

The Sikhs of the Punjab never allowed the White rulers any respite. They kept them engaged with one *morcha* after another. And these agitations produced a galaxy of

eminent freedom fighters who earned a great name in the national struggle for India's Independence. Some of them are: Baba Kharak Singh, Master Tara Singh, Pratap Singh Kairon, Giani Gurmukh Singh 'Musafir', Sohan Singh 'Josh', Sardar Sardul Singh 'Caveeshar', Giani Zail Singh, Sardar Hukam Singh, Sardar Gurdial Singh Dhillon and Darshan Singh Pheruman.

While the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee set up to take charge and look after the Sikh Gurudwaras accepted the cult of non-violence, at the same time there were certain elements amongst the Sikhs who organised themselves as underground terrorists. Among them the Babbar Akalis were perhaps the most virulent. Their members were drawn from the Ghadar Party and soldiers on leave. They issued a cyclostyled bulletin called *Babbar Akali Doaba*. They became a terror for the administration in Jullundur Doab for a while. They were led by Havildar Major Kishan Singh Bedang and Master Mota Singh. But sooner than later they were rounded up, six of them including Kishan Singh Bedang were condemned to death and the rest were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment.

The Sikhs make fine soldiers. They are as loyal as they are valiant. They got themselves enlisted in large numbers both at the time of World War I and World War II. But after the Wars were over when they found that the Britishers had no desire to part with power, they fought them tooth and nail. They were scandalised to find that the Britishers would deny them the freedom for which he made them fight in far-off lands. They fought the war of India's Independence shoulder to shoulder with the rest of their countrymen, whether they were Hindus or Muslims, Beharis or Bengalis.

VIII

CASTING IN LOT WITH SECULAR INDIA

The Sikhs were on the horns of a dilemma. The Muslim League was asking for Pakistan. The Sikhs were also an important minority, entitled to a separate identity and a separate homeland. The British Government was willing to concede it. It had indicated it unmistakably. Every time negotiations for the transfer of power took place, the Sikhs were included in the parleys in their own right, whether it was the Round Table Conferences or the Cripps or any other mission.

The Sikhs had another dilemma to resolve. World War II was still raging. The brave Sikh soldiers were in great demand. There was unemployment at home. Recruitment to the forces would provide work and wages and more than anything else enlightenment. The soldier returning home would help set up small and medium-scale industries which were the need of the time. But the Congress had decided not to cooperate with the war effort as long as the Government did not come to terms with it. On the one hand, it was their enlightened self-interest, on the other the Quit India movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi. On the one hand, the Sikhs were offering themselves for recruitment to fight shoulder to shoulder with the British and on the other hand, they were courting arrests in the satyagraha launched by the Congress.

There was yet another predicament, a consideration that probably gnawed at the core of the Sikh sensibility. While the Muslims were close to their faith, the Hindus were intertwined with them socially. They inter-married

and they could dine together. This was seldom done with the Muslims.

And as regards historical perceptions, while the Muslims were unkind to the Sikhs, more particularly in the later part of Mughal rule, the Hindu rajas of the hill states did no less to harass Guru Gobind Singh and his followers.

Even in modern times, while there were frequent clashes with the Muslims, the Sikhs had no fewer grievances against the Hindus too.

It was, therefore, no easy task for them to make a choice.

Luckily, the leadership of the Sikh community at this crucial juncture was in the hands of Master Tara Singh, a man of sterling character, whose integrity was beyond question. A staunch Sikh, he had nothing but the interest of his people at heart. He was utterly truthful, nothing could ever deflect him from the righteous path. Unafraid and outspoken, he had little use for so-called tact, diplomacy or political manoeuvring. If the Sikhs ultimately decided to cast in their lot with secular India, the credit must go to Master Tara Singh alone. The Chief Khalsa Diwan or the Congressite Sikhs at the time carried little weight with the Sikh community; it was the Akali Dal that largely represented the Sikh masses, of which Master Tara Singh was the unquestioned leader. Like Mahatma Gandhi, it mattered not if he held any party office or not. His modest house next to the Sikh Missionary College in Amritsar was the vortex of Sikh political activity, deliberations and decision-making. Though self-opinionated, he never let his instincts have the better of him. A true Sikh, he must consult his colleagues before arriving a decision.

The first clear indication of the Sikh thinking regarding their choice is to be had in Master Tara Singh's letter to Sir Stafford Cripps of 31 March 1942 after his meeting with the Cripps Mission: 'We have lost all hope of receiving any consideration. We shall, however, resist by all possible means separation of the Punjab from the all India Union.'

What had put off the Sikhs was the Cripps Mission postulating that immediately after the War was over, an elected body of Indians would be invited to frame a constitution with the provision that if any constituent of the Union wished to opt out of the Indian Union, it could do so. Evidently this was to accommodate Mr Jinnah, who was insisting on Pakistan.

The Sikhs had pinned their faith in the Congress leaders who they thought would not accept the creation of Pakistan. This was belied when C. Rajagopalachari came forward with his formula conceding the right of the Muslim majority provinces in the north-east and north-west to pull out if so established by a plebiscite. The worst was that Rajaji claimed that his formula had the approval of Mahatma Gandhi. This enraged the Sikhs. A convention was held on 20 August 1944 in Amritsar in which Master Tara Singh, out of desperation, as it were, for the first time made the demand for an independent, sovereign Sikh State claiming that the Sikhs were a separate nation. However, it was rejected as an impossible demand in the same convention. Nevertheless, the convention appointed Master Tara Singh to organise the Sikh opposition to the division of the country or any part thereof.

Accordingly, the main issue on which the Sikhs fought the general elections of 1945-46 was opposition to the division of the country. They received a massive mandate. The communists amongst the Sikhs who supported the demand for Pakistan were routed in the elections.

The Sikhs' negotiations with the Cabinet Mission which visited India on the eve of Independence were highly frustrating. The negotiations were held under the overall leadership of Master Tara Singh but the record shows that whosoever met the Mission, whether it was Giani Kartar Singh or Harnam Singh Advocate or Baldev Singh, they struck a different note. What they succeeded in convincing the Mission was that the Sikhs' demand for a separate State was not serious. It was only to counter the Muslim

League's demand for Pakistan. And there was no denying it.

Accordingly, while reporting to the British Parliament, Sir Stafford Cripps found the Sikh stand rather untenable: 'What the Sikhs demand is some special treatment analogous to that given to the Muslims. The Sikhs, however, are a much smaller community, five and a half million against 90 million Muslims and are not geographically situated, so that any area can be carved out in which they find themselves in a majority.'

Exactly this position was stated by Master Tara Singh himself in his autobiography later: 'We were aware of the fact that our case was weak for three reasons: (1) We asked for a Sovereign Sikh State if Pakistan were to be conceded. Our demand was, therefore, dismissed as counter move, no one took us seriously; (2) The Hindus who appeared to support us did so to oppose Mr Jinnah. In their heart of hearts, they did not subscribe to what we had asked for; (3) In the Punjab Legislative Assembly the Sikhs were divided with 23 Akalis and 10 Congressites and then there were just two tehsils of Taran Taran and Moga, where the Sikhs were in a majority and these, too, were not contiguous.'

Thus the Sikh demand for a separate Sikh State was never put forward seriously. It was neither considered seriously by any party. Eventually, when India came to be partitioned, what the Sikhs succeeded in was to partition the Punjab also, so that the Sikhs could cast in their lot with secular India and merge themselves in the mainstream of Indian society.

Even after Pakistan had been conceded in principle, the Sikhs had pinned their hopes in the Boundary Commission since they somehow felt that their important shrines like Nanakana Saheb, the birth-place of Guru Nanak, and the canal-irrigated belt that they had developed with strenuous labour, would not be denied to them. They had a disappointment in store for them. With the

announcement of the Radcliffe Award, the Sikhs were equally divided between India and Pakistan. The Akali Dal under Master Tara Singh rejected the Award. However, they could not do much because their representative, S. Baldev Singh, had already accepted it as a 'settlement'. He served in the Union Cabinet as Defence Minister.

The Sikhs had to pay dearly for it. Pakistan was determined to get rid of them. Communal riots took a frightful toll of their life and property. They had to leave their hearths and homes and evacuate to East Punjab. Sir Francis Mudie, the Governor of West Punjab, is said to have written to Mr Jinnah, the Governor General of Pakistan, on 5 September, 1947—'I am telling everyone that I don't care how the Sikhs get across the border. The great thing is to get rid of them as soon as possible., There is still no sign of three lakh Sikhs in Lyallpur moving, but in the end, they too will have to go.'

While crusading for Pakistan, Feroze Khan Noon, a Muslim League leader had announced; 'If we find we have to fight Great Britain for placing us under a Central Hindu Raj, then the havoc which Muslims will play will put to shame what Chengiz Khan and Halaku did in the past.' Exactly this is what was perpetrated on the hapless Sikhs and Hindus of West Punjab.

Their children were speared. Their womenfolk were abducted and raped. They were slaughtered most heartlessly in hundreds and thousands. Their property was looted and their houses were set on fire. The police of the newly-created Pakistan, when not joining hands with the rioters, watched them from a distance. All this had its repercussions in East Punjab and the Sikhs and Hindus paid their neighbours in the same coin. The holocaust that followed has no parallel in Indian history—nay in that of the world.

It is estimated that not less than half a million human lives were lost in killings on both sides of the border. As many as five million Muslims were hounded out to Paki-

stan and twice as many Hindus and Sikhs evacuated to India, the Sikhs concentrating mostly in East Punjab.

It needed a herculean effort to rehabilitate them. But with the generous help of the Union Government and the indomitable spirit of the Sikh refugees from Pakistan, they were not only resettled but they also converted what used to be an arid wasteland into a fertile region. East Punjab, which was a deficit state when it came into being, is the virtual granary of India today. The green revolution has brought prosperity to the farmers. The Punjab claims the highest per-capital income today.

They say, every cloud has a silver lining. The Sikhs who were scattered all over the vast province, as a result of the partition, came to be concentrated in what is known as Punjab today. They have a State carved out on a linguistic basis. Howsoever small it may be, they are no more discriminated against. They have an exclusive homeland of the Punjabi-speaking people. And as it is, the Sikhs enjoy majority in it.

IX

THE LANGUAGE FACTOR

Puchhi jinhan ne 'Sharaf' na vat meri
Ve main boli han unhan Punjabian di.
('Sharaf,' I am the language of the Punjabis
Who have never cared to cast a glance at me.)

These are the words of a celebrated Punjabi poet, Babu Feroz Din Sharaf, on the plight of the Punjabi language in the then undivided Punjab. They hold good even today, more than three decades after the creation of the Punjabi Suba in 1966. Maybe it is worse now. The avenues of patronage have shrunk in the diminutive Punjab of today. The antipathy of the split-away States of Haryana and Himachal Pradesh is the other factor. Haryana would have Telugu rather than Punjabi as the second modern Indian language in the school curriculum. The same course is followed by Himachal Pradesh lest the Punjab lay claim to Punjabi-speaking enclaves in the State.

As a student of Punjabi literature, I often wistfully remember the time when the Punjab stretched from the NWFP to Delhi, from Tibet to Sind. Punjabi used to be spoken widely in the Qissa Khwani Bazaar of Peshawar and the Lal Chowk of Srinagar as recently as in the forties! Shimla was the summer capital of the undivided Punjab and also of the so-called East Punjab after Partition.

I call Punjabi an accursed tongue. In the undivided Punjab the British rulers made the Muslim majority of the province believe that their language was Urdu and not what they actually spoke at home and in the bazaar. This

led the Hindus to switch to Hindi. Thus the Sikhs were left to remain attached to Punjabi for the eminent reason that the Sikh Gurus used it as the medium to propagate their mission.

Another reason why Muslims and Hindus distanced themselves from Punjabi was the insistence of the Sikhs on using the Gurmukhi script. While Gurmukhi is the most appropriate script for the Punjabi language, it was not devised by Guru Angad, the second Sikh Guru, as popularly believed. A man of vision, Guru Angad did promote the Gurmukhi script, but it was in vogue long before Guru Nanak appeared on the scene. Recent research has proved beyond doubt that the Gurumukhi script was drawn from the Brahmi and Kharoshti scripts. Therefore, the Sikh adherence to Gurmukhi is as misconceived a sentiment as the Muslim and Hindu opposition on sectarian considerations.

Be that as it may, the fact remains that Punjabi is the mother tongue of the entire Punjab. But in all the political machinations—first partition then the carving out of the Punjabi Suba—the worst sufferer was the Punjabi language. One's mother tongue is like the warm blood in one's veins. No one can disown it howsoever he may try, and it can be replaced only under pain of death. Punjabi remains the mother tongue of Punjabi Hindus despite the fact that they are ambivalent about it. Punjabi remains the mother tongue of those Punjabis who now call Haryana and Himachal Pradesh their home. Punjabi remains the mother tongue of Punjabis who have settled in Delhi and other parts of the country after Partition.

Muslims in the Pakistani half of Punjab, who never made an issue of their mother tongue at one time, realised its importance only after the creation of Pakistan. They now swear by it. Every front-rank writer—from Faiz Ahmed 'Faiz' to Maulana Abdul Majid Salik—has tried his hand at writing in Punjabi. Punjabi is now taught in schools and colleges up to the post-graduate level in

Pakistan. Punjabi films surpass Urdu films in popularity. Their Radio and TV stations reverberate with programmes in Punjabi.

This is yet to happen in the Indian part of the Punjab.

Politics has played havoc with Punjabi writing. A State which boasts of the highest per capita income has perhaps the lowest number of books published in any regional language. Eminent writers have drifted to other languages—Mulk Raj Anand, P. Lal and Khushwant Singh to English, Krishan Chander, Rajinder Singh Bedi, and Khwaja Ahmed Abbas to Urdu, Mohan Rakesh, Krishna Sobti and Upendra Nath Ashk to Hindi, to name only a few. They have no doubt done well in the languages of their adoption. They would have done even better if they had stuck to their mother tongue.

Notwithstanding all this, Punjabi literature is most forward-looking, progressive in outlook and inhospitable to parochial tendencies. The earliest Punjabi poet was Baba Farid, a Sufi saint who wrote in the 12th century. he said:

Je toh priya di sik
Hiao na thahin kahinda.
(If you long for the beloved-God,
Don't you hurt any heart)

Then came a number of Hindu yogis and ascetics until we come to Guru Nanak (born 1469). A poet of cosmic vision, he belonged not to the Punjab alone but to the entire subcontinent, nay the whole world. He travelled to Nagaland and beyond in the east, Sri Lanka and Lakshdweep in the south, Baghdad in the west and Mansarovar, deep in the Himalayas in the north. He visited Hardwar, Varanasi and Puri as a devout Hindu would; he also went to Mecca and Medina donning the blue garments of a Turk or a Pathan. He made friends with "siddhas"—the enlightened ones and had prolonged discussions with them. He also cultivated Muslim divines and mystics and talked to them on the ways of God and man.

For his constant companion, he had Mardana, a Muslim *Rabab* player, and Bala, a Hindu, who is said to be the author of his earliest biography *Janam Sakhi Bhai Bale Wali*. He knew Persian and wrote poetry in it. He was equally proficient in Sanskrit and claimed scholarship in the *Vedas* and the *Shastras*. He was indeed an integrated personality the like of which it is difficult to imagine. It is no wonder that he is known as:

Baba Nanak Shah Faqir
Hindu ka Guru, Musalmon ka pir.
(Baba Nanak, the great man of God,
Is the guru of Hindus and pir of Muslims)

Guru Nanak was witness to Babar's attack on India and the atrocities committed by his *lashkar*. The sensitive poet in him was enraged. He wrote a number of compositions called "Babarvani" to protest against the barbarities perpetrated by the invading army. And his sympathies lay not with the Punjab alone but with Hindustan, the entire country.

Said Guru Nanak:
Khurasan khasmana kiya, Hindustan draya.
(He occupied Khurasan and subdued Hindustan.)

Continuing with the hymn he describes India as a gem of a country and calls the aggressors dogs:

Rattan vigad vigoye kuttin
Moiyan sar na kaee.
(The dogs have ruined the gem of my country.
No one would remember them after they are no more.)

Guru Arjan Dev (1563-1606), the fifth Sikh Guru, was a great poet in his own right. He is the compiler of the *Holy Granth*, the text of which is not restricted to the Sikh Gurus alone. It has hymns composed by the Sikh Gurus together with compositions of 36 men of God belonging to various castes and creeds, religions and avocations.

The ninth Sikh Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur, did not write in Punjabi, he is an important Hindi poet of his time. More than 200 years earlier his preceptor, Guru Nanak, had declined to wear the sacred thread as a mere ritual; Guru Tegh Bahadur sacrificed his life so that the Hindus could assert their right to wear the sacred thread. For this supreme sacrifice he came to be known as *Hindi ki Chadar*, protector of India, again not of the Punjab alone.

Guru Gobind singh, the tenth Sikh Guru, was a great scholar of Sanskrit and Persian, who sent his disciples to Varanasi to study Hindu scriptures and recruited 52 poets to translate outstanding Sanskrit and Persian works for the benefit of the common man. Guru Gobind Singh, who was born in Patna in Bihar, passed away in Nanded in Maharashtra. He authored works in Sanskrit and Persian.

Among the "Five Faithfuls" selected by the Guru as his closest followers, Mohkam Chand was from Dwarka, Himmat Chand from Jagannath Puri and Sahib Chand from Bidar (Karnataka).

In Maharaja Ranjit Singh, we have for the first time a Punjabi ruling the Punjab. There could not have been a more secular sovereign than Ranjit Singh. When the Sikh armies were locked in fight with the British forces after Ranjit Singh's death, in a rare tribute Shah Mohammed, a Muslim poet, said:

> *Aj hoye sarkar te mul pave*
> *Jehdian Khalse ne teghan marian ni.*
> (Had the Sarkar—Ranjit Singh—been alive today, He would have appreciated the exploits of the Sikh soldiery.)

In recent times the Jallianwala Bagh killings and the Akali morchas deeply affected and stirred the entire nation. Rabindranath Tagore gave up knighthood as a protest against the massacre and Mahatma Gandhi congratulated the Sikh community when it wrested control

of the Sikh Gurudwaras.

During the negotiations preceding Independence, Master Tara Singh wrote a letter to Sir Stafford Cripps on March 31, 1947: 'We shall, however, resist by all possible means separation of Punjab from the Indian Union.' Eventually, when the subcontinent came to be partitioned, the Punjab too was divided and the Sikhs cast in their lot with secular India and became a proud part of Indian society.

The plight of the language and literature of this heroic people with an unparalleled tradition of patriotism and a glittering catalogue of sacrifices for the country is, to say the least, pitiable today. The Pakistani part of the Punjab has certainly returned to the fold of its mother tongue, but it is mismatched with the Persian script, thus turning its back on India. The language is getting more and more Persianised since the people must borrow to express new needs and new strains of modern society, the same way we in India borrow from Hindi and Sanskrit. My fear is that before long the Punjabi language in the two parts will become stranger to each other.

The current ban on the entry of reading material from India into Pakistan has made matters worse; the Pakistani Punjabi writers and readers as much as the Indian Punjabi writers and readers across the political divide remain unexposed to each other's new writings. Political relations being what they are, Pakistan just does not recognise any non-Muslim Punjabi writer. For them Farid in the 12th century is followed by Bulleh Shah (1680-1758) and Waris Shah (1735-1784). Neither Guru Nanak nor Bhai Gurdas ever wrote in Punjabi! And amongst the moderns, Bhai Vir Singh, Dhani Ram "Chatrik", Mohan Singh, Nanak Singh and Shiv Kumar Batalvi just do not exist for Pakistanis. Amrita Pritam is known only for her poem in which she invokes Waris Shah!

Victim of a Conspiracy

The Punjabi-speaking people can claim one of the oldest

civilizations of mankind. According to the renowned anthropologist, Dr H D Sankalia, in a paper entitled Paleolithic, Neolithic, and Copper Ages based partly upon the findings of the Cambridge expedition of 1935, 'it is more or less established that Early Man first entered the foothills of North-West Punjab, the area traversed by the Soan, Haro and other rivers within the Indus-Jhelum Doab and comprised the Rawalpindi and Attock districts of the Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir States, at the end of the First Inter-Glacial period and the beginning of the Second Ice Age in the south-west of the Himalayas. Human existence is testified to by the presence of large flakes which are found embedded in fan-shaped boulder gravel of this period in the Siwalik foothills and plains in the North-West Punjab, Poonch and Jammu.'

The late Principal Teja Singh, an eminent Punjabi litterateur, maintained that the language the people of the Punjab speak is Punjabi. It has been changing its complexion from time to time. The current Punjabi language came to be evolved in the twelfth century when most of the modern Indian languages of the sub-continent came into being. One of the earliest Punjabi poets who is still read and enjoyed is Baba Farid, a Muslim Sufi. He belongs to the twelfth century. Interestingly his verse is included in the Holy Granth, the Sikh scriptures compiled by Guru Arjan in the time of Akbar. A man of God, Baba Farid's utterances have a universal appeal; there is nothing sectarian, communal or narrow-minded about them:

Says Farid,
My bread is made of wood,
And hunger is my sauce;
Those who indulge in rich fare,
Will suffer untold agonies.

Says Farid,
Why must you roam the jungles with thorns pricking your feet?

Your Lord Dwells in your heart
And you wander about in search of Him.

Says Farid,
I thought, I was alone who suffered,
I went up and stood on the terrace,
And found every house on fire.

These slokas written in chaste Punjabi are enjoyed in the Punjab by the Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims alike. They were probably written in Persian script at the time of Farid but are preserved in Gurmukhi script in the Holy Granth.

Punjabi is the language of the Punjab whether it forms part of Pakistan or India, whether it is the Punjab that came into being as a consequence of the Partition in 1947, or the so-called Punjabi Suba that was carved out of it in pursuance of the linguistic reorganisation of states in India. Punjabi is the mother tongue of the people of the Punjab whether they are Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs or belonging to any other faith.

As regards script, Punjabi has been written in the Persian, Devnagri and Gurmukhi scripts. The Persian script is still in vogue in Pakistan, (It has been named Shahmukhi with slight modifications.) while Gurmukhi has been officially adopted as the only script for Punjabi declared to be the official language of the reorganised Punjab on the linguistic basis in India. The Devnagri script which was found in occasional use in certain quarters prior to the coming into being of the Punjabi Suba has since gone into disuse.

The Punjabi-speaking people in Pakistan had never any use for the Devnagri script. The number of people who are conversant with the Gurmukhi script across the border could, perhaps, be counted on the fingers of one's hands.

The Punjabi language and the Gurmukhi script both seem to have been victims of a conspiracy of circumstances. In pursuance of their well-designed policy of *divide et*

impera, the Britishers succeeded in convincing the Muslims of the Punjab that Urdu and not Punjabi was their language. It was preposterous but the Muslims were beguiled. Accordingly, the Punjabi Hindus were drawn closer to Hindi. This left the Sikhs amongst the main communities of the Punjab who remained attached to Punjabi. They had a sentimental reason for it. Their scripture that they read every morning is in Punjabi. Similarly, they are believed to prefer the Gurmukhi script because the Holi Granth is found written in this script.

The Punjabis in Pakistan continue to swear by the Shahmukhi script. There are historical reasons for it. Apart from the fact that the partition of the sub-continent took place on the communal basis and Gurmukhi has come to be associated with the Sikhs, a large number of the Punjabi classics that have endeared themselves to the readers are in Persian script. What with Shah Husain and Ghulam Farid, Bulleh Shah and Waris they have made patron-saints out of them.

Recently Gurmukhi is said to have been introduced in the post-graduate curriculum in Punjabi in Pakistan. It is a move in the right direction and should go a long way in bringing research and higher study in the language closer to each other in both parts of the Punjab. As it is, because of the altogether different ancestry of the two scripts, Punjabi as written in the Punjab across the border in Pakistan is drifting more an more towards Urdu and Persian. And the Punjabi as practised by students of literature in India tends to draw its vocabulary from Hindi and Sanskrit. In the absence of a common script and also because of the lack of facilities for exchange of reading materials, this gap is yawning wide day by day. My fear is that if this is not plugged in appropriately, the day may not be far when the Punjabi language as written and spoken in Pakistan will acquire a complexion altogether different from the Punjabi language we have it in India.

Not long ago I had an occasion to discuss this vital

issue with writer friends from across the border. They seemed to share my fear and accepted the suitability of Gurmukhi script for the Punjabi language unequivocally. They also realised that by adopting the Gurmukhi script they would be heir to a massive volume of highly advanced literature that is available in Punjabi in the Gurmukhi script with us. But it seems the hang-over of Urdu seems to stand in their way. It cannot be denied that Urdu continues to be the State language in Pakistan though it belongs to none of their constituent units. Out of the population of 80 million in Pakistan, 60 million are Punjabi-speaking and yet Punjabi writing in Pakistan can hardly compare with Urdu as a language of creative expression whether it is poetry or drama, short story or novel. The reasons again are historical. The charm of Urdu is inescapable. It is a rich language. It has Mir and Ghalib, Iqbal and Faiz writing in it. Then, Urdu came to be associated with their struggle for Pakistan. It has a symbolic significance and a mighty one at that. Our brethren across the border are welcome to it. One can appreciate their predilection for it. But the claims of the mother tongue remains supreme. They must not forget it.

I am reminded of an interesting incident in this context. It was 1942. The Second World War was still raging. Maulana Abdul Majid Salik, one of the most eminent Urdu scholars of his day and Chief Editor of the Urdu daily the *Zamindar* used to broadcast counter-propaganda talks from the Lahore Station of All India Radio where I worked as a programmer. One evening, after Maulana Salik had finished his broadcast in Urdu, he came to my room and said, 'Duggal, how do you write in Punjabi? Whenever I think of it, I am at a loss. I believe one can only make love or hurl abuse in Punjabi.' I listened to the old master, who was venerated by our generation and laughed. Many years passed, much water had flown under the bridge. India had been divided. Pakistan had come into being. Once When I was sitting in my office in the Broadcasting

House in Delhi, I found Maulana Salik heading towards my room. He happened to be visiting India. I came out to receive the Maulana and escorted him to my room. As he sat, he told me jubilantly, 'I have come to tell you that I have started writing in Punjabi. We are going to have a daily paper in Punjabi brought out shortly in Pakistan for which funds are being collected.' I didn't believe my ears, since Maulana Salik was one of the pillars of Urdu in Pakistan. 'But how did this change come about?' I was curious to know. It was, indeed, nothing short of a miracle. And the Maulana narrated a highly meaningful incident why he had switched to Punjabi at his ripe old age. While travelling by bus one day the Maulana asked for a ticket from the bus conductor. Now, ticket is a masculine gender in Urdu and feminine gender in Punjabi. The conductor who was an evacuee from the U.P. in India contemptuously laughed at the Maulana and corrected him in the bus full of his admirers. The Maulana realised that he made the grammatical mistake because Urdu was not his mother tongue. He decided to write in his mother tongue, Punjabi, alone for the rest of his life.

That was in 1954. It seems a happy change has been sweeping over the Punjab in Pakistan ever since. There is unmistakable realisation that the cultural destiny of a people lies with their mother tongue. If programmes broadcast from the Lahore Station of Radio Pakistan or telecast from their TV station are any indication, the love for the mother tongue of the Punjabi-speaking people in Pakistan is unbounded today. Urdu may continue to remain on the pedestal it is occupying but the Punjabi-speaking people across the border seem to assert that Punjabi alone is their mother tongue. And they must give it its due.

Be that as it may, it is not easy to change horses in midstream insofar as creative writing is concerned. Faiz and others have certainly attempted writing in Punjabi but none of them has been able to achieve the excellence they claim in Urdu. All these years our friends across the border

have been swearing by Punjabi, but the volume of their output in the language is meagre.

Nevertheless, some of their poets do show promise. Ahmed Salim, Sharif Kunjahi, Muneer Niazi, Muneer Sheikh, Tariq Azeez and Najm Husain are better known names among them.

What is hopeful is that almost all the outstanding Urdu writers in Pakistan are Punjabis. And when the pull of the mother tongue asserts itself, they might one day enrich the Punjabi language and literature with their creative writing. The love the people of the Punjab in Pakistan have for Punjabi is the greatest guarantee for it. It is said that they have constructed a tomb for Waris Shah, one of the greatest Punjabi poets, at a cost of 40 lakh rupees recently and not less than a lakh of his admirers visit the tomb every year. They collect 4 lakh rupees every year by way of offerings made at the tomb. They seem to have made a saint out of the Punjabi poet. One can see a bright ray of hope in it.

And also in the writings the like of which is Afzal Ahsan Randhawa's short story entitled *Guachi Hoi Khushbu* (Lost Fragrance) in which he talks about the brotherly love the Muslims in the pre-partitioned Punjab had for their Hindu and Sikh neighbours. Salman Syed's poem *Ik Udas Manzir* (A Sad Sight) is another example of it:

Bahut purane, tutte-bhajje
Kai lagge ik mandir te baithe hoe kabooter
Aapis de wich gallan kardian
Ik dooje ton puchhde rahnde
Is mandir da wali kaun?
Is mandir da waris kaun?
Kidhron koi jawab na aunda
Mandir apnian akhan de vich
Mote mote athroo bharke
Asmanan wal takda rahnda
Takda rahnda!
Ronda rahnda!!

(Perched on an ancient, dilapidated
Time-worn temple, are two pigeons.
They are talking to each other
And ask,
Whose is this temple?
Whom does it belong to?
Nobody seems to give them an answer.
With tearful eyes
The temple stares at the sky,
Keeps on staring
And keeps on crying!)

Such writings in my opinion are our greatest hope. One day they will bring us together as good neighbours, binding us with the silken bonds of the love of our mother tongue, Punjabi.

The Punjabis are a spirit-born people. Wherever they are, whether in Pakistan or in India, their unity and understanding will bring peace and make for amity in the sub-continent. And my conviction is that this can be brought about by our common heritage—the Punjabi language and literature.

This, indeed, is only a part of the story. Punjabi as a language had to fight a formidable battle for recognition of its due place in India after independence. The main reason was the reluctance of the Punjabi Hindu to formally accept Punjabi as his mother tongue. He spoke Punjabi at home with his kith and kin but when it came to declaring his mother tongue, he would say—it is Hindi! There were two reasons for it. Learning Gurmukhi script appeared to him as an unnecessary burden. And learning Hindi gave him the feeling of belonging to the national mainstream, since he must learn Hindi as the 'link language'. This fact of erroneous thinking sowed the first seed of discord in the Punjab between the Hindus and the Sikhs in independent India. Tempers ran high on the eve of the 1951 census. There was apprehension of large-scale disturbances. Rath-

er than solving the problem, Jawaharlal Nehru had the column pertaining to mother tongue in the Census enumeration proforma removed in respect of the Punjab. He thought that better sense would prevail with the Punjabi Hindus in due course. Unfortunately it did not. The opposition of the Hindu in the Punjab to the mother tongue persisted. It delayed unduly the reconstitution of the State on the linguistic basis. The Akalis had to launch a morcha for the creation of the Punjabi Suba. It was a gruelling struggle for ten long years. Thousands of Akalis courted arrest. Ultimately the Government saw reason. But the communal-minded amongst the leadership played mischief again. Giving the Akalis an impression that they were going to carve out for them a homeland where they would be in a majority, they pared off large chunks of Punjabi-speaking areas and merged them into Himachal Pradesh and Haryana! The Akalis were beguiled, not realising that the slender numerical majority that they had achieved could hardly ensure for them political majority to rule over the State. This craving for political power led to unrest and misunderstandings that kept on multiplying and resulted in the flare-up which has been as long-drawn as agonising. Thousands have lost their lives. Property worth several crores has been destroyed. The sanctum-sanctorum of the Sikhs was desecrated. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated and Sant Longowal, the Akali Chief, fell at the hands of the militants. The worst sequence of this grim tragedy was the preplanned, most savage massacre of innocent Sikhs in Delhi, Kanpur, Bokaro, Indore and elsewhere in the country after the assassination of Mrs Gandhi. It has left deep wounds in its wake. They will take long to heal. But their commitment to Punjabi continues to be a cementing factor.

The Root Cause of Trouble

The root cause of trouble in the Punjab, it seems, is not the language, as we came to believe but the script. During one

of my visits to the Punjab, I happened to be talking to an eminent journalist friend who remarked, "We Hindus accept Punjabi as our mother tongue but we have our reservations in respect of Gurmukhi script.'

It is a welcome departure of the Punjabi Hindus from their erstwhile posture that Hindi and not Punjabi was their mother tongue. It was this assertion that sowed the seed of discord and estranged the two communities. In due course the debris of disaffection started piling up, involving the Centre as well for being partisan and discriminatory towards the Sikhs.

It is an interesting revelation. The reason why the non-Sikh Punjabis resist owning Punjabi as their mother tongue is because of its Gurmukhi script that has obvious sectarian overtones. And the reason why a large majority of the Sikhs feel unduly attached to Gurmukhi script is because of their belief that it was devised by the Sikh Gurus. Both are gravely mistaken; the postulates are misconceived.

Gurmukhi script is a misnomer. It was not devised by any Sikh Guru. It is not known how it came to be called as such. According to Bhai Kahn Singh, the author of *Mahan Kosh* (Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature):

> 'Since the Guru's word was recorded in the script, it came to be known as Gurmukhi. It is also known as *Punjabi Varan Mala* since the Central Punjabi can be rendered best only in this script.'

Recent researches have established beyond any shadow of doubt that the Punjabi language was fairly well developed in the twelfth century, when the noted Sufi poet Baba Farid Shakarganj wrote in it with remarkable proficiency. A developed language must have evolved a script of its own. The belief that Gurmukhi script was devised by Guru Angad Dev, the second Sikh Guru, is misplaced. Long before Guru Angad, Guru Nanak, the first Sikh Guru, wrote an acrostic called *patti* in the *Rag Asa* in which he used all the thirty-five alphabets of Gurmukhi

script as against fifty-two alphabets of Devnagri script with the sound-values current today. To inspire a poet of Guru Nanak's stature to attempt an acrostic in a script, it must be popular and in wide use.

However, there is no denying the fact that with the advent of Muslim rule in the Punjab, along with Gurmukhi script, Arabic script also came to be employed for writing in Punjabi. According to Professor Pritam Singh, the noted researcher:

> 'Since the time of Caliph Umar, the educational policy of the Muslims towards their conquered lands did not put any hurdle in the way of Muslim settlers and converts using local or national languages, provided these were written in Arabic script. Persian, Uzbek, Tajik, Turkish, Pushto, Baluchi, Sindhi, Western Punjabi (Lahandi), Kashmiri and Hindi are some of the languages which were extensively put in use by the Muslim writers. In fact, they were as good as pioneers in almost all these languages, but in each case Arabic or modified Arabic script was used with the result that their original scripts along with the bulk of indigenous literary and cultural treasures preserved in those scripts were lost for good. Guru Nanak did not want this ancient land of his to be cut off completely from its cultural roots. He, therefore, decided to use the local script, later called Gurmukhi, for all his work. Thereafter, Gurmukhi script became the script of culturally resurgent, identity-conscious Punjab, tracing its roots to its own country rather than to Arabia or any other foreign land.'

Gurmukhi alphabets are simple, fewer and most appropriate for the Punjabi language. There is at least one alphabet which is peculiar to the Gurmukhi script and takes care of typically Punjabi speech sound. It has no corresponding alphabet in Devnagri script though it does have one in Arabic script. Similarly a couple of Punjabi alphabets in common with Devnagri have altogether

different sound values in Hindi and Punjabi.

While Guru Nanak employed Gurmukhi script for his scriptures and Guru Angad and other Sikh Gurus following him promoted it as best as they could and thereby perhaps it acquired its present nomenclature, the Sikh Gurus have little else to do with it. A Christian clergyman Father Newton who prepared Punjabi grammar in 1851 observes:

> 'It is generally believed that Guru Nanak formulated the Gurmukhi alphabets. While it may be true that he modified some of them, but the fact remains that these alphabets are very old. Out of 35 alphabets, not less than 22 can be found in ancient edicts in their primordial forms and can be deciphered as such, 3 alphabets can be traced back to the 5th century B.C. and 12 to the 3rd century B.C.'

Writing in *Punjab Prakash* in 1936, the renowned philologist Dr Raghuvira says:

> 'Gurmukhi script like Devnagri (employed for Hindi, Marathi, Nepali) alongwith other scripts such as Sharda, Tibetan, Bengali, Oriya, Mewari, Nandi, Nagri, Takri, and Gujarati etc. is derived from some form of Brahmi with which we are not acquainted yet. Like some other Indian scripts, it is phonetic in nature. We write as we speak. Gurmukhi script is self-sufficient; it does not need support from any other script. In short, when we have an adequate script for a language why must we think of anything else?'

There is no truth in the assertion that Gurmukhi script has been derived from Devnagri script either. Comparing Gurmukhi script with Devnagari script we find:

1. They have 2 alphabets in common.
2. They have 5 alphabets resembling each other.
3. Their 14 alphabets have nothing in common.
4. Their 14 alphabets have some resemblance to each other.

As against this, comparison of Gurmukhi script with Takri script shows:

1. The two scripts have 15 alphabets that are common.
2. Their 5 alphabets are similar.
3. Their 5 alphabets have resemblance to each other.
4. Their 8 alphabets are altogether peculiar to the 2 scripts.

Gurmukhi is closer to Takri which is prevalent in the hilly region of the Punjab. Gurmukhi is also closer to Sharda. Grierson believes that Gurmukhi has been derived from Sharda. Whatever the origin of Gurmukhi script, it seems Gurmukhi and Devnagri are only distant cousins.

Gurmukhi script takes care of all the sounds in the Punjabi language. There is one alphabet for each sound. There is no alphabet which is used in writing but remains silent in reading.

Until the advent of the Arya Samaj in Punjab, while there were ever so many Hindi and Braj manuscripts written in Gurmukhi script, there was not one Punjabi manuscript transliterated into Devnagri script. Punjabi was, of course, written in a modified Arabic script which was due to the prevailing practice of the Muslim rulers. Guru Nanak's *Pran Sangli* is said to have been written in 'Turki script' but it is now being disputed if Guru Nanak ever wrote this work.

Before the coming into being of the Punjabi Suba, the politicians in the Punjab toyed with the idea of accepting Punjabi as the language of the State with Devnagri as its script. However, it did not work because of communal politics of the day and also perhaps because it was found that a number of Punjabi sounds could not be rendered adequately through Devnagri script.

At times it is argued that if Punjabi could be written in Arabic script before Partition and continues to be written in Arabic script in West Punjab even today, why must we insist on Gurmukhi script alone for Punjabi? The script is

the soul of a language. Writing Punjabi in Arabic script inevitably pushes it towards Urdu and Persian with the result that the authentic character of the language starts changing imperceptibly. This is exactly what is happening to Punjabi in Pakistan. This must unavoidably happen if Punjabi were to be scripted in Devnagri. The tendency would be to draw from Hindi and Sanskrit. And the language would lose its original character.

Every language has its own script and it is best that it is written in it. In the words of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru:

> 'A change in script is a very vital change for any language with a rich past, for the script is the most intimate part of its literature. Change the script and different word pictures arise, different sounds and different ideas. An almost insurmountable barrier is put up between the old literature and the new and the former becomes a foreign language that is dead.'

While there is no denying the fact that Devnagri is the most scientific script, Punjabi being the language of a simple people, Gurmukhi script meets its needs most adequately. Any sophistication introduced with Devnagri will inevitably interfere with the sound-values of spoken Punjabi.

Every time I have writer-friends from the West Punjab come over to meet me, I discuss the problem of script with them. Invariably they concede the validity of my argument but they seem helpless in view of political constraints despite the example of their Muslim brethren in Bangladesh.

Be that as it may, who forbids the Hindus in the Punjab from employing Devnagri script in their day-to-day use as the Muslims did with Arabic script in the undivided Punjab? They must not distance themselves from their mother tongue.

X

ROLE OF THE PUNJABI WRITER

It is said that the legendary Bhindranwale had two goals before him: to discredit the Union Government led by the Congress and to unite the Sikh community. He failed miserably in achieving either despite his fierce struggle as long as he was alive. He achieved both these objectives in his death. At least for a while.

There is no doubt that Operation Bluestar alienated the entire Sikh community. And to that extent the Sikhs were united as never before whether they were in India or abroad. Bhindranwale called a 'miscreant' became a 'martyr'. There were not a few who believed that he still lived and that he would appear on the scene at the appointed hour. There were those who swore having seen him with their own eyes after the storming of the Golden Temple complex. They awaited his reappearance like that of Subhash Chandra Bose. It was believed that he had crossed the border and gone over to Pakistan. Accordingly, his wife and other close relatives refused to participate in his last rites performed in his village by his followers.

The defilement of the Golden Temple by his killer squad was completely forgiven and forgotten. A great many maintained that like a true Sikh of Guru Gobind Singh, he raised arms against the aggressor and laid down his life fighting against the intruders in the holy premises. How could the like of him die? He is immortal. He had the Guru's own hand over his head to protect and bless him.

That Guru Gobind Singh who devoted his entire life fighting the tyranny of the Mughals had not forgotten the

Sikh Panth came to be believed by thousands of Sikh devotees who congregated at the Gurudwara Dukh Niwaran at Patiala and several other Sikh shrines, not excluding those in Delhi, to have the 'sacred' glimpse of the falcon supposedly belonging to Guru Gobind Singh which suddenly started appearing at the holy sites. They believed that it did so during the *Guru Ka Bagh morcha* and other agitations launched by the community. The enthusiasm of the faithful in these gurudwaras at the hour of the appearance of the 'sacred' falcon was to be seen to be believed.

On the other hand, as a mediaperson, I was amazed at the massive propaganda mounted by the Government and how it was going waste. The electronic media had lost their credibility altogether. Measures like *Karseva* conducted under State auspices were termed as onslaughts on Sikhism, designed to split the community, with the result that the situation continued to deteriorate.

Punjabi writers started giving vent to their pent up emotions at the virtual imposition of army rule after Operation Bluestar, as never before. Some of the most grim and heart-rending poetry was written on the theme. It was a phenomenon which had hardly a parallel in our literary annals. Even the holocaust of the Partition did not agitate and inspire the creative writer the way the storming of the Golden Temple had done.

There were indignation and sorrow in Dr Harbhajan Singh's words when he described the attack on the Akal Takht in his poem entitled *Ki Faujan da Maan* (Forces Need Not be Vain) :

Wherefrom have the forces come?
From where they brought the poison
And wherefrom all the tyranny?
Which serpent has emitted a hiss
Blowing the barricades down?
The sacred tank is defiled
And the marble stones are afire.

Scattering fistfuls of venom.
Wherefrom have the forces come? (August 1984)

Dr Harbhajan Singh in another poem:
Are you a real or a stepmother?
You've slaughtered and thrown us in the sun.
And you ask for the wounded to apply balm on their wounds.
The only house of God I had
You've brought down with a blow.
Now where do I prostrate?
Where do I go and pray for you? (August 1984)

In a tender piece by Hamdard Nasushehrvi, an old mother advises her son gone abroad not to return home to the Punjab of today:

Even the illiterate these days
Must listen to the news before their morning cup
And then there is quiet all around
The tea gets cold.
In this jungle of silence
Words hit like bullets
And arguments like gunshots.
Don't you come for the present.
I know you miss your home
I know you long to be back
You must not come for the present. (August 1984)

Gul Chauhan in *Lo*, a Punjabi monthly brought out from Amritsar:

If you must ask
Let me tell you
The story of the Holy City
And the plight of the devout.
Have you ever seen someone torn from his tradition?
Have you ever heard tanks rolling over dreams?
Have you ever seen an innocent child stand before a

loaded gun
And then collapse in his own pool of blood with dignity
On the astro-turf of dead bodies on the marble?
If you haven't seen this,
If you haven't heard of this,
Then you would never understand
How agonising and painful the happening was
And how soiled is the colour of the smoke
Spiralling out of a helpless poem. (August 1984)

In yet another poem entitled *Na marne jogi na jeene jogi* (Neither dead nor alive), it is maintained that it is love and amity, brotherhood and good neighbourliness that have been a casualty in Operation Bluestar:

How long will this firing continue?
I am already battered
Torn to bits.
Some say,
It's the Sikh spirit,
Others believe it's the Punjabi identity
Shattered and done to death.
I am amity,
Like a burnt-out log
I sit beside the sepulchre of satya and ahimsa
Neither dead nor alive. (Duggal, August 1984)

Looking back at this grim scenario of utter alienation of a people, the calamitous assassination of Indira Gandhi appears to be a sequence of the Greek tragedy, as it were.

Indira Gandhi's assassination at the hands of her own Sikh security staff led to widespread killings of the Sikhs and destruction of their property in Delhi and other parts of the country. It seemed for a moment that the edifice of secular India has miserably crumbled. There were unmistakable pointers to a premeditated, diabolical design to humiliate a community and teach it a lesson. An attempt

was made to mutilate the ego of a heroic people.

While the entire press in the country condemned the holocaust with one voice, unimpeachable inquiry commissions gave their verdict against the Government's stand and its inaction to punish the culprits continued to bewilder the writer in the Punjab.

A great deal was written on the disturbances that followed Mrs Gandhi's assassination. Poems, short stories, plays and reportages were attempted depicting the atrocities and indignities inflicted on a community with a glorious tradition of great sacrifices and unparalleled heroism in the cause of the nation. More than the poets, fiction writers took greater notice of this tragic episode in recent history.

In a short story entitled *Band Ḅand Kataun Wale* (Those Who Would Have Mincemeat Made of Them) a young Sikh fearing that he would come to harm at the hands of the rioters has his hair trimmed. But his sweetheart, a Hindu girl, would have none of it. 'I gave my heart to a Sikh,' says she, 'those who would rather die than filch from their faith.' In another short story called *Punjabi Character* a Hindu neighbour originally from the West Punjab saves a Sikh family at grave risk to his person and property when surrounded by a murderous mob of rioters.

The euphoria following the Rajiv-Longowal pact was too short-lived to find its echoes in creative writing. Doomed to premature death, it created a stalemate and the resultant frustration that has found expression in ugly militant activity. The unending killing spree of innocent men, women and children day after day, week after week, month after month made the writer in the Punjab feel small. He was utterly helpless.

The Government was waiting for the position of strength before it started negotiations and the militants, in the meanwhile, were mounting their graph of killings relentlessly. Their tally included students of literature like Dr Vishwa Nath Tewari, progressive poets like Pash and

promising journalists like Sumeet Singh of *Preet Lari,* a leading Punjabi monthly magazine.

Who can condone this indiscriminate slaughter? The creative writers' community in the Punjab was bewildered. The grim spectacle of senseless killings seemed to have made them forget that Chandigarh had not been transferred to the Punjab in spite of the Centre holding out hopes repeatedly. They seemed to be no more bothered about the river waters dispute. The maldistribution of the linguistic areas at the time of the carving of the Punjabi Suba was hardly ever mentioned. They seemed to have rearranged their priorities. They must first fight the menace of terrorism. The killing of innocent men, women and children must stop. The Hindu-Sikh amity which is the bedrock of Punjabi must be maintained.

Surjit Patar, a leading poet among the younger generation, reminds his readers that they lost Waris Shah, the Muslim bard who gave us the immortal romance of *Heer-Ranjha,* when the country was partitioned. Are we now going to lose Shiv Kumar Batalvi, the Hindu lyricist who has captured the hearts of young and old with his enchanting Punjabi love songs?

It was Waris who was lost to us yesterday
Is it Shiv Kumar's turn now?

Similarly Swrajbir, a young intellectual taken to writing meaningful verse, bemoans the lot of Amritsar, the town founded by Guru Ram Das, the fourth Sikh guru, as the Mecca of the devout, torn with inner conflicts and withering away amidst communal tensions:

Amritsar, where are your hope-laden morns
That informed the heart of its yearnings?
Amritsar, where are your peace-loving pigeons?
Amritsar, where are your eyes,
I wish to see if tears lurk in them?
Amritsar, which religion professes extremism?
What faith do you subscribe to?

Amritsar, why are you being decimated bit by bit?
Amritsar, how is it that my words
Decline to go into the mould of poetry?
They seem to doubt their own connotation.
The words have left me all alone.
Which jungle are they going to?
Amritsar, do you listen what is being announced?
No one may move out of his house.
Birds must not sing in their nests.
Every *maina* must walk with hands lifted up
Skipping is alien to the times.
Deaths must not be mourned but counted.
Eyes must not see.
We must build citadels of suspicion

(Amritsar—an extract)

Under the Shadow of Death

Moving into the twentieth century, we have two broadly marked signposts in Punjabi letters called Modern Writing followed by New Writing. The Modern Period was ushered in with Bhai Vir Singh. It was overtaken by what came to be known as New Writing with the advent of Progressive Writing in the forties. The agony that the Punjab has had in its lot to suffer in the eighties has thrown up another definitive younger generation of writers, more especially in the realm of poetry who could be called newest of the new.

Their verse written under the shadow of death is born out of the soil, it reflects the current milieu and yet there is nothing ephemeral about it. It is perceptive, has a marked character and complexion of its own and bids to be abiding. What is most remarkable about this crop of writers is that they are far superior in talent to their predecessors amongst the Modernists and the Progressives at their age. Barring a few, the general run of them were certainly not as sensitive, as reflective and as technically innovative.

What the new generation has in its favour is that their postulates are uniformly free from the elitism of the Modernists and the dogmatic absolutism of the Progressives. They are strictly democratic. Theirs is essentially confessional poetry. It has its own romantic and lyrical charm. Their clinical confessionalism, incidentally, helps build a bridge over the sunken road between the Modernists and the Progressives of yester-year. Unlike Progressives, they give due regard to the tradition of poetic craftsmanship. The pursuit of form is a sort of creed for them. Equipped thus, they eminently succeed in uttering the unutterable. They astound, they hurt, they provoke and yet are acceptable. They are intense and delicately beautiful and at the same time personal and realistic.

The Modernists made a well-marked departure from medieval writing. They tended to be elitist. Bhai Vir Singh studiously steered clear even of the freedom struggle. Living in Amritsar, he did not take notice of the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy that moved Poet Tagore to renounce his knighthood. The Progressives were much too preoccupied with the have-nots, the suppressed and the downtrodden. Between these two extremes, there was a silence that needed articulation. The newest of the new sings of this silence. More important names among them are: Surjit Patar, Mohanjit, Tara Singh, Jagtar, Manjit Tiwana, Joga Singh, Harbhajan Halvarvi, Jaswant Deed and Swrajbir.

The political instability, communal alienation and religious fundamentalism seem to torture the soul of the younger generation of Punjabi poets today as nothing else does. Maybe they took the cue from Amrita Pritam when she said:

May God help this household
Where Ranjha used to dwell
One hears the footsteps of Kheras.

The people of Punjab are unusually attached to its soil, its mountains, its rivers, its lush green crops. Says Puran

Singh, the savant:

I have gone round the whole world
Nowhere did I find the water as sweet
Nowhere did I breathe the air as salubrious as that of the Punjab.

Despite the shadow of terror in the eighties with 10-20 killings a day, the countryside of the Punjab was peaceful as the towns humming with activity. Visiting the Punjab seemed to belie stories figuring in the Press. Mohanjit, a more committed protagonist of his group, articulates this love-hate complex in these words:

I was born here
I was brought up here
I am the glory of this soil
And also its dirge.

The agony that the people of the Punjab have suffered for these long years, whether it was pulling members of one community out of buses and doing them to death or spraying bullets indiscriminately in streets or mowing down innocent men, women and children, whether it was Operation Bluestar or the 1984 frenzy of Sikh baiting consequent upon Mrs Indira Gandhi's assassination, it has left the sensitive soul of the young Punjabi poet seared. It finds its expression in many voices and at various levels.

Manjit Tiwana, a Sahitya Akademi award-winner, is bewildered:

What times are these
Sitting on the threshold of it
We ask the whereabouts of our home?

Halvarvi is more scared. In his poem entitled *Parbat* (Mountain) he says:

There is emptiness on the peaks.
We may get lost,
Let's return to the warmth of our homes.

Minder articulates the dilemma of millions of his fellow Punjabis who were witness to heartless killings by misled militants as also of the security forces engaged in fake and not-so-fake encounters in pursuance of the diabolic strategy of 'bullet for bullet', and did not know whom to blame:

I had a blanket on my shoulders
And a flute in my hand,
I went nowhere, nor did I sleep;
Who has handed over this gun
And left a dead body in my arms?

Jaswant Deed, the author of *Bache Ton Dardi Kavita* (Verse Fearing the Child), uses the child as a symbol for the innocent, peaceful and God-fearing Punjabi with dreams in his eyes:

What song they sing in the town
That I fear
My child may be disturbed in his sleep!

The younger generation Punjabi poet delves into darkness, looks for chaotic order, tries to integrate form and content, makes his poetry correspond to the breath and pulse and the movement of his mind. He had heretical distrust of language. Jaswant Deed again:

I detest the word Shanti.
It remains metamorphosed on paper;
And there is conflict prevailing all round.

Having seen the miserable performance of their politicians and the Establishment refusing to shake off the British-groomed tradition of commitment only to the chair, the poet in Jagtar cautions the reader:

When I am no more, friends!
You can be a boat,
You can also be a spinning-wheel,
You may be a multi-coloured seat,
Even a rocker,

But don't you ever be a chair.

Another feature of this group of Punjabi poets is the overwhelming participation of women writers in it. Numerically and also, perhaps, qualitatively they seem to outdo their male counterparts. More important among them are: Manjit Tiwana, Pal Kaur, Surjit Kalsi, Nirupama Dutt, Gagan Gill, Ka Na Singh, Amar Jyoti, Kamal Ikarsi and Mrs Pritam Sandhu. They view the man-woman relationship in a more liberal form. The earlier generation woman-poet never felt complete without man. This is sustained no more. Manjit Tiwana tries to give a new meaning to the status of woman in our society. The woman in her verse begs for no sympathy, nor does she ask for equality. She believes that woman is woman and man is man; woman is different from man but in no way inferior. She has demonstrated the glory of woman in her longer poem entitled *Savitri*, published in book-form. Amar Jyoti has called her collection of poems *Kaun Buddha Si*? (Who was Buddha?):

Whose tale it is
It's left for you to decide;
Whether of Yashodhara or Siddharth
Who repaired to the peace of the jungle
Leaving Yashodhara behind
To bring up Rahul
Congruent with the royal
Customs and traditions
Who made the glittering glass-house of her life a ruin
Behind the portals of a palace,
Where her sight turned into an unending path
Waiting for Siddharth.
And when he returned from the quiet of the peaceful abode.
As Buddha the wise,
Who was enlightened,
Siddharth or Yashodhara?

They are totally secular in outlook. They equal God-head with aesthetic sensibility which is the source of their poetry. Their endeavour is to arrive at the outside by moving inward. They tear down the walls of high culture. Creativity for them is liberation of the imagination.

AFTERWORD

Punjab Needs a Composite Cultural Pattern

What has been happening in the Punjab in the eighties will put every right-thinking Punjabi to shame. People do have grievances and there are avenues in a democratic set-up to give vent to them. The most unhappy would be Guru Nanak himself who strove for communal understanding and brotherhood of man.

To my mind, we had been inevitably heading towards the situation in which we found ourselves in the Punjab. Why we did not face impasse earlier is a surprise.

The seeds of communal distrust were sown a decade and a half ago when the Punjabi Suba in its present form came into being. It left every well-meaning Punjabi disenchanted. Though late, Delhi conceded the concept of a Punjabi-speaking State in conformity with its commitment to reorganising the provincial boundaries on the linguistic basis. However, it was left to a handful of narrow-minded politicians both at the Centre and in the Punjab to work out its details. They played havoc with it. The short-sighted Hindu saw to it that as much of it as could be managed was pared off the erstwhile State, so that the unilingual Punjab was left as diminutive as it could be. It seemed, it suited the parochial Sikh, who laughed in his sleeves. These machinations on the part of the bigoted Hindus were going to give a clear majority to the Sikhs in the new State. And this is what the diehard Sikh was looking for. It seems the people of the reorganised Punjab

were driven to cast themselves into a narrow mould. It is no surprise that we suffered the consequences thereof.

This error of commission was followed by an equally grave error of omission. The successive Governments in the Punjab, whether they were Congress, Akali or Janata, did precious little to foster healthy values: a composite cultural pattern in the State. Lost in a headlong race for banishing poverty by bettering performance in the fields and enhancing production in the factories, they were left behind in sensitive areas like art and culture. With the result that today the Punjab is utterly without any tradition of classical or light classical music. It has hardly anything better than Bhangra by way of dance. Its artists, whether it is Satish Gujral or Krishan Khanna, have become alien.

The worst off are the creative writers. The Punjabi writer who felt that with the creation of the Punjabi Suba, the flood-gates of opportunities would be opened for him is dismayed. What to speak of attracting Punjabi authors like Rajinder Singh Bedi, Mulk Raj Anand, Khushwant Singh, Krishna Baldev Vaid, and Krishna Sobti to take to writing in Punjabi, not a few eminent authors writing in Punjabi are drifting away to Hindi and English.

Punjabi theatre has not made much headway. A worthwhile production here and there seems to be not much noticed.

After the green revolution, the Punjab is poised for an agro-industrial revolution. No one could stop the green revolution despite the waters of the Punjab rivers going to neighbouring states in no small measure. The hardy Punjabi is going to usher in an agro-industrial revolution whether he has to sweat without power and run his pumps with diesel oil month after month and year after year.

This new Punjabi is going to fritter away his energies in slogan-mongering and wasteful pursuits if he is not given an opportunity to cultivate finer sensibility. He will indulge in vulgarity if he is not introduced to better

pastimes. The new life makes a lonely modern man. The affluence, at times, can be frightfully destabilising. It can kill the human in man, make him selfish and self-centred.

We must guard against it. The time is now and here, if it is not too late already. All mischief is made in the mind of man and it is here that stable defences against evil must be erected.

The media in the Punjab, therefore, have a grave responsibility. That they have miserably failed was proved when a seniormost journalist and a freedom fighter was slaughtered in a dastardly attack. Every phrase that is put to pen must be weighed. We have all the freedom; but not the freedom to set our house on fire.

Punjabi films continue to be as cheap as ever. The film in regional languages like Kannada and Malayalam, Bengali and Marathi has made long strides. The Punjabi film remains where it was. The Government must fill in the gaps wherever they occur. It must step in with appropriate support where a social or cultural need demands it.

The Radio and TV need to improve their image by better quality programmes. Their propaganda broadcasts will carry conviction only if they improve their general performance. They must give their audiences aesthetically satisfying programmes to cultivate their taste. It is hardly necessary to add that a lot more needs to be done in this respect.

And this brings me to creative writing which is one of the most vital factors in keeping people together. It has been the worst sufferer in the Punjab. The Punjabi writer is in a miserable plight. The people in the Punjab have yet to develop the reading habit.

There should be a network of libraries in the State. It is the only way to foster the reading habit and it is also the only way to resuscitate our publishing industry in the present circumstances.

Those who read good books live in good company. Those who pursue fine arts have finer sensibilities, sharper

perceptions. They have a wider vision and a larger heart. They have little time for narrow pursuits and parochial bickerings.

Let the people of the Punjab read books so that they know why the greatest Sikh leader of our time, Master Tara Singh, chose to cast in the lot of his community with India when what is now called Khalistan could be had for the asking at the time of independence.

What the people of the Punjab need is fostering the Punjabi identity.

What is the Punjabi identity?

It is love of the Punjab. It is love of the Punjabi language. It is love of the Punjabi way of life. A Punjabi is a good neighbour; neighbours are born of the same parents, runs a Punjabi saying. A Punjabi is hard-working. Work hard and share your earnings with others, said Guru Nanak. A Punjabi is ever ready to make any sacrifice for his land and his people, his tradition and his heritage. A Punjabi keeps abreast of the times. He is happy-go-lucky and full of enterprise. A Punjabi is one who believes that what others can do, he can do better. The silken bonds of this Punjabi identity will bind the people of the Punjab together for ever and ever.

Glossary

Amrit	Nectar
Ang	Limb
Ashtapadi	A poetic measure with 8 couplets
Badshahi Masjid	Royal mosque
Bandi Chhor	Liberator of the detained
Bani	Holy word
Baramah	A poetic form with a bearing on 12 months of the year
Bhakta	Devotee
Bhakti	Devotion
Chhand	Poetic measure
Degh	An oversize cooking vessel
Dharma	Faith
Doha	A poetic measure with two lines
Faqir	Muslim recluse
Fatwa	Verdict given by a Muslim divine
Gatha	A poetic form
Ghadar	Revolt
Goonda	Miscreant
Gurmata	Resolution of the Sikh religious body
Gursikh	Follower of the Guru
Harimandir	The abode of God. The name given to the Golden Temple at Amritsar
Jagir	Landed property
Jatha	Band
Kachha	Short pants

Kada	Bangle
Kafi	Poetic measure popularised by mystics in the Punjab
Kalma	The holy word
Kangha	Comb
Kesh	Hair
Khadi	Homespun cotton
Khanda	A double-edged weapon
Kikar	*Acacia Arabica*, a tree common throughout the Punjab
Kirpan	Dagger
Kripa	Goodwill
Langar	Common kitchen
Lathi	Stick
Manji	Seat
Maulvi	Teacher
Miri	Royalty
Misal	Band
Mohar	Gold coin
Mool Mantra	Basic postulate
Morcha	Agitation
Mufti	Magistrate
Mussali	A low-caste among the Indian Muslims
Pangat	Eating together
Panj Piyare	The Five Beloveds who offered themselves to be martyred by Guru Gobind Singh
Patashas	Sugarcandy
Patwari	A village-level functionary who keeps land records
Piri	Renunciation
Qazi	Judge
Rabab	String instrument popular in the North-West of India
Raga	Musical form
Raj	Rule

Sacha Padshah	True King
Sadhukari	Link language popularised by yogis in the North in the sixteenth century
Saje	Established
Sangat	Congregation
Sarbat Khalsa	Assembly of the Sikhs
Sardar	Leader
Saropa	Gift in recognition of merit
Sati	Immolation
Satnam	God is truth
Seli topi	A consecrated headgear
Shabad	Holy Word
Shahidi Jatha	A band of volunteers pledged to be martyred
Shaikh	Muslim caste
Shakti	Power
Sharriat	Muslim law
Shikar	Hunting expedition
Siddhas	Hindu ascetics
Siharfi	Acrostic
Sikka	Coin
Sloka	Short poetic measure
Sufi	A mystic
Swadeshi	Indigenous
Swaiyya	A poetic form
Tegh	Sword
Var	Ballad
Walliallah	Beloved of God
Yunani	A system of medicine

Index

Without communal harmony no social or political progress can be achieved in a multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-racial country like India. All great religions are based on the concept of universal brotherhood. This lucidly written book, discussing one such religion, the Sikhism, in the context of its secular perceptions, is intended principally for the lay reader and contributes to the understanding of an important trait in India's national fabric.

K.S. Duggal is a poet, playwright, novelist and short story writer. He is the recipient of several important literary awards including the Sahitya Akademi Award and the Soviet Land Nehru Award. A former Director of the National Book Trust, India, K.S. Duggal was conferred Padam Bhushan in 1988 and nominated Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha) in 1997 by President of India in recognition of his contribution to Indian literature.



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